NAPOLEON
AND
THE ARTISTS

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NAPOLEON AND THE ARTISTS

Photograph: Grant Richards Ltd.

THE REAL NAPOLEON

From an engraving by Vigneux

8084

NAPOLEON
AND THE ARTISTS

BY

HAMIL GRANT

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NOTE ON THE GABRIELLI PORTRAIT OF NAPOLEON

We invite the reader's attention to the so-called Gabrielli portrait of Napoleon, executed by Vigneux, and here presented as a frontispiece. This portrait was emphatically declared by the relatives of the Corsican—including the Emperor's mother, his sisters, and his uncle, Cardinal Fesch—to have been the only *one which bore anything like a truthful resemblance to their august kinsman. Prince Gabrielli, its original owner, and a distinguished contemporary and visitor of Napoleon, attached great value to the work on this account. As will be seen, it bears small resemblance to accepted portraits of the Emperor.*

The majority of the artists who have transmitted to us the traditional face of the Conqueror—ascetic, severe and somewhat scowling—sought, it would seem, to flatter Napoleon, regarding whose early Classical obsession they were fully informed, by giving to portraits of their illustrious sitter those attributes of feature and expression with which sculptors represent Romans of the heroic age. The portrait by Vigneux dates from 1807, when Napoleon had well outgrown his worship of Antiquity. Genius, we may be certain, in any case, has no specific facial type.

H. G.

"Le plus bel éloge de cet homme extraordinaire c'est que chacun veut en parler, et que tous ceux qui en parlent, n'importe comment, croient de s'agrandir."

Pozzo di Borgo.

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CHAPTER I

THE GENESIS OF NAPOLEON

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REPRODUCTION of the immediate and normal stock is the rule of heredity, the experts tell us; whereas reproduction of the remote and phenomenal is the exception. The supersimian called Man inherits intuitions, instincts, predispositions and temperamental traits from his ancestors, even as he reproduces their physical attributes and tendencies. This being the case, we deduce correctly when we say man's destiny is not so much what is to be, as what has been, and those eugenists are probably right who declare the drab and unpoetical truth—namely, that in the last analysis man's spinal cord is his very self, his nature and potential—that which fits or unfits him for the fight in life, which determines his character, his courage and his driving force, which makes him the clever or the inept animal among the human herd, which decides for his annals as they shall be—humble, mediocre, or the opposite. Fontenelle, the distinguished nephew of the great Corneille, told the unhappy truth, we fear, when he said that for supreme success or domination in the world there was one prime requisite, and he named it when he wrote the phrase: "a callous heart in a sound body." Put this axiom of worldly wisdom beside one of the profoundest and most cogent verdicts we have yet seen contributed to the explanation of the eternal Corsican—in effect, that the wonderful mind of Napoleon was lodged in a wonderful body,[1]

[1] *Napoleon: The Last Phase.*

and we find ourselves on the way to divining the personality of the being whom Cardinal Newman once described as a Miracle of Nature.

And yet Lord Acton was, after all, right: the more we study the Corsican in the light of historical documents, the less a Colossus does he appear, though perhaps he grows nearer, being found to be so human a creature, to the sympathetic student's heart. Not only as a man and a statesman does he lose stature, as we investigate the method by which he sought at all costs to stamp one vast impression of himself upon the page of History; he even dwindles as a soldier, and the day has gone for good, we think, when men could solemnly accept such a verdict as the following, rendered by Lockhart and subscribed to in the main by two generations of the Victorian century:

"Nations yet to come will look back upon his history, as to some grand and supernatural romance. The fiery energy of his youthful career, and the magnificent progress of his irresistible ambition have invested his character with the mysterious grandeur of some heavenly appearance; and when all the lesser tumults and lesser men of our age shall have passed away into the darkness of oblivion, history will still inscribe one mighty era with the majestic age of Napoleon."

Given the theory of ancestral environment, the genealogy of Napoleon becomes of first-class importance if we wish to understand, or come near to an understanding of, that momentous personality which to a large extent has set the

fashion in spectacular greatness ever since its appearance in the world at the close of the eighteenth century. In the case of great men, says Stendhal, biographers are apt to fall into one of two excesses: either they attribute a fabulous ancestry to their heroes, or else out of sheer envy and malice, they seek to show that those of whom they write were of far lower and meaner origin than was actually the case. This has been so with Napoleon, though all attempts either to exalt or to abase him in respect of his ancestry, have resulted only in forcing us to recognise the truth of La Bruyère's assertion—namely, that there are no families in the world, whether exalted or plebeian, which, could we accurately trace their pedigrees, would not be found to touch the loftiest origins, at one particular point, and the lowliest at some other.

The Bonapartes had already been several generations in Corsica when Napoleon was born, and his four great-grandfathers, Bonaparte, Paravisino (Paravicini), Ramolino and Pietra-Santa were all of grandparents born in the highland canton of Lunegiana, under the Ligurian Apennines and about forty miles direct east from Genoa. There is little doubt, we think, for all the attempts to confer an exalted social ancestry upon Napoleon, that his forbears for six generations before his birth had occupied in Corsica a local position corresponding, we may suppose, to the minor lairds of Scotland, and there is no question that the subsequent ennobling of certain Corsican

families about 1770—including the Bonapartes—by a royal decree of Louis XVI., was due solely to the policy of bringing the newly annexed islanders into social and political alignment with the system in France, even as Napoleon was to ennoble certain of his "gentle peasants" of Holland in 1810. That in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the tribe of Buonaparte had occupied high political position in Italy, is much less certain than that their name had been inscribed on several civic golden books, like that of Treviso, simply because members of the race had filled more or less important magistracies and aldermanships in their home towns; and on the whole we are of opinion not only that so titanic an energy, physical and mental, as that of Napoleon could never have sprung from a very ancient line of leisurely or even refined aristocrats, but that this very energy, whether in its personal, its political or in its social symptoms, bore at all times the impress of having come from the common source of nearly all names which achieve a universal fame—to wit, the educated or upper classes, as apart from the patriciate, and of course education here means very much more than mere instruction, or academic learning.

Corsica is far from being without its ancient chronicle, and Seneca is said to have declared of its inhabitants that their first law was the law of vengeance. A Corsican writer of the Middle Ages, Petrus Cyrnœus, already told the world that "the Corsicans are a factious race and live

only for glory. Vengeance is the mainspring of their code of honour, and in order to avenge an insult or an injury, they will move heaven, earth and hell to obtain full satisfaction. Whether he be dead or alive, beware of the Corsican who has not avenged himself on an aggressor." The stories of Corsican *vendette*, we are all acquainted with, and even Napoleon was the object of one of these throughout his career, his enemy, Pozzo di Borgo, a distant relative by marriage, never having forgiven him the fact that when both were candidates for a colonelcy of Corsican national guards, the preference had been given to the future emperor. We are inclined to think, however, that too much importance has been attached to Pozzo's diplomatic activities during the Empire, more particularly when it is asserted that ideas of vengeance were really the inspiration of his enmity for Napoleon, as well as of the many intrigues by which he sought to destroy the imperial fabric. The method of attaining to fame by attacking one who has already attained to fame has, it is well known, been a favourite one among doomed mediocrities of all ages, and the Emperor's relentless compatriot does not appear ever at any time to have proved insensible of his opportunity.

Napoleon has been accused of having had no love for Corsica, just as he has been accused of looking upon France "as a throne rather than a nation," to quote an illustrious Russian. Here, in point, is what the Emperor himself, when at St Helena, had to say of his native island :

"The Corsicans have always had something in them of a race apart, and this is due to their insular position, which preserves them from contact with the mixed peoples of the mainland. Corsican highlanders possess an energy of character and a firmness of soul which are entirely peculiar to them. And as for the beauty of that little island—nothing could exceed it. Even the very presence of its soil I could note with eyes closed, and I have never known its like anywhere. I can see myself there in my earliest years and my first affections, tricking my way round the mountain precipices, climbing the loftiest peaks, careering down the passes and playing in the silent valleys, ever the most devoted of partisans in my family's feuds, and taking sides with all my kith and kin in a vendetta which went back seven generations. . . . I even thought of taking refuge there in 1815, and am certain that I should have won over all the inhabitants, who would have accepted me as their King and who would have been to me as one great family. Do you think that even fifty thousand of the Allied troops would have ventured to attack me there? And even if they had, to what end—to gain what?"

Are the Corsicans to be numbered among the racial puzzles of the world? They are said to have sprung originally from some remote Iberian stock, and characteristics which have been found among the people of Albania, of the Basque countries and the Berbers of Northern Africa, are admitted by anthropologists to be common

to the inhabitants of the island. In the course of the early ages, the Phœnicians—as in Ireland, be it noted, which is famous for its reproduction of the Napoleonic type—the Carthaginians, the Ligurians and the Iberians founded small and nomadic colonies, until the Greeks finally established a civilisation there some six centuries before Christ. Subsequently, on account of their piratical practices, they were driven thence by the people of Etruria, who succeeded in finally and permanently impressing their cachet on the islanders. The Bonapartes, as we have seen, were of Ligurian origin, and in the earliest days of Roman civilisation, the people of Liguria were held to be of Germano-Gallic rather than Italic stock, which was short and broad-headed, while the Ligurians were tall and long-headed—the family type of the Napoleons, to which their great chief proved, however, an exception. All writers, ancient as well as modern, agreed in attributing one salient characteristic to the Corsicans—namely, that they appeared to consider themselves superior to other races, and would voluntarily engage in no servile or menial work; the native was sober, obliging, hospitable, grateful, a firm friend, a terrible enemy, logical, practical, inclined to be sultanic in his treatment of women, intriguing and always very curious to know what the other man was doing, expansive with his friends, silent and reserved with strangers. A German writer, Razel, declares that until the eighteenth century no Corsican generation had

existed which had not known either invasion or civil war—an important point.

Diodorus Siculus said of these islanders that the hardest Roman slave-masters dared not subject them to the ordinary tasks of other helots on account of their rebellious and intractable character. "They will not live in slavery," says Strabo, "and if they do not kill themselves before submitting to the degradation of low menial work, they so conduct themselves as to make their masters regret the money expended on their purchase." After the fall of the Roman Empire, Corsica, in the seventh century, they teach, came under the domination of Constantinople and then received that strong religious impress which informs the general character of the native with a mysticism that is hardly to be differentiated from superstition. Charlemagne handed them over to the Popes in the tenth century, and the Saracens carried fire and sword through the island in the eleventh, after which a feudalism of a Germanic type settled for some centuries upon the country, administered and inspired in the main by high Ligurian officials. Nevertheless the spirit of the clan was ever so powerful a characteristic of Corsican society, that the feudal lords practised a larger liberalism in their exactions from, and their dealings with, the proud islanders than was customary, under the system, with less independent races. Every Corsican became a rebel at the first sign of oppression on the part of his lord, and so there

grew up a society of men who would acknowledge no masters—another important point.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find them in 1730 declaring an entire independence of Genoa and, at the outbreak of hostilities, inaugurating a theological council which, by asserting that justice was on the side of the revolting islanders, gave to the whole uprising the character of a holy war. The Genoese called in the help of several corps of German troops of the Emperor Charles VI., under the command of the Prince of Wurtemberg, who was only too pleased to sign a treaty of peace with the invincible islanders in 1732. In 1736 a German adventurer of noble birth, Baron Theodore von Neuhof, arrived in the port of Aleria, and having assured the popular leaders of his possession of great influence at the courts of Europe, offered to undertake the final liberation of the island from Genoese tyranny. Eventually, after the distribution of considerable largess, Theodore was named King of Corsica, and besides founding a nobility, also inaugurated many civic reforms, invited foreign industrialists to take up residence in Corsica, disciplined the army and ultimately attacked Genoa. Success did not attend on his extra-insular military expeditions, however, and he soon found himself obliged to have recourse to his great diplomatic and political friends on the mainland. He left the island, appointing a regency of four persons, one of whom was Jacopo Ornano, a blood relation of the Bonapartes.

Theodore came back in 1738, but only for a short while, and left again for the Continent, entrusting all interests to his great-nephew Baron Drost, who afterwards, be it noted, married a lady of the Bonaparte tribe. The King again returned to the island in 1743, provided with plenty of arms and munitions; he had grown despotic, however, during his exile, and being badly received by the popular leaders, went back to London, where he was arrested for debt and spent several years in the Fleet, until released by the good offices of Horace Walpole. All of which we mention only to show that the adventure of bold and successful usurpation was certainly not lacking among the inspirations which subsequently moved the young soldier of Italy to exalted self-promotion.

In the stirring days when Paoli took command of affairs in Corsica, he employed the services of Charles Bonaparte, father of Napoleon, as personal secretary. This gentleman had married, at the age of eighteen, a beautiful girl of fifteen, Letitia Ramolino. It is worth noting that apart from the fact that this alliance was a genuine love match—always an important condition for the children issuing—it contained many other elements of a Romeo-and-Juliet type, since the Ramolini were really of the Genoese faction, while the Bonapartes were of the insurgent side—Guelphs and Ghibellines, again, on a minor scale, or Capulets and Montagues of Verona. Like the honourable wife and mother she ever proved

herself, Letitia gave up her life with singular devotion to the interests of her husband's people, and ruled the family home at Ajaccio with the impartial severity and justice of a Roman matron. The old home of the Bonapartes no longer exists, it may be said, for all the venal assurances of the local *ciceroni*. The actual house, near the site of the present one, was much smaller, and the Bonaparte family rented only half of it at that—some indication, we may presume, that their means were of a limited extent.[1] In 1771 Charles Bonaparte, who was a Doctor of Law, had been appointed a kind of executive judge (*giudice assesore*) to the high court of Ajaccio, a town which boasted at that time a population of 3000 inhabitants. The name Napoleon was common enough in Corsica in several families with which the Bonapartes were connected, and was spelled impartially Napoleone, Nabulione, Lapulione, Napollone, and was probably derived from the old Genoese patronymic Nebulone.

The Bonapartes had relatives in nearly all classes of the local society, but the majority of the allied families were small landowners who also engaged in the wine and corn trades. Charles Bonaparte, as a member of the high court—with £40 a year as a stipend!—was admittedly the

[1] It has been estimated that the Bonapartes lived for several years on less than £100 a year. Those who are at all acquainted with the *ménages* of provincial Italy are well aware that such a sum is often made to go to very respectable lengths—for middle-class Italians.

head of the family alliance, more particularly when he had been chosen member of the commission of twelve representative Corsican nobles. There is no doubt whatever, we think, that though Bonaparte *père* was disposed to be something of a spendthrift and a high liver, he was a man of considerable refinement, great literary tastes, ever looking to the advancement of his family. To this end, indeed, he engaged in several schemes which caused his integrity to be called in question more than once, and like the good time-server he was, saw no harm in making the public treasury pay the limit for his services. So we find him writing to M. de Calonne, in 1784, asking for assistance:

"I am the father of seven children, Monseigneur, the eighth already on its way, and being almost without fortune for the reasons herein mentioned, have the honour to solicit your protection and your justice in favour of my poor family. . . ."

In no country in the world is the principle of equality and fraternity carried into practice to the same extent as in Corsica, says Prosper de Merimée in his work *En Corse*, and if real democracy has a home anywhere, it is certainly in this island where the employers and employed live on terms of tribal familiarity, the result being that "rich and poor," to quote the Frenchman, "hold the same ideas, since they are always exchanging them." The wealthiest man in Ajaccio in those days was, it is recorded, worth about £8000—a certain Signor Baciocchi, of whose family the world has also heard.

It is fairly well established now that the Bonapartes of Ajaccio had but few documents going to prove that their line had once been either a very ancient or a very splendid one. The alliances which the family had made since their arrival on the island were in all probability what the French term "très honorables," meaning very respectable, but by no means very exalted. Charles Bonaparte would appear to have been highly proud of his connection with the minor squires Bozzi and Ornano, through which connections the oldest Corsican blood was transmitted to the Napoleons. By Letizia's side, they claimed descent from the mighty Colonna *gens* of the twelfth century, and in the days of his own greatness Napoleon emphasised this claim on behalf of his then exalted tribe. With regard to the many expedients to which Bonaparte *père* resorted in order to establish beyond question the nobility of his blood, it has to be remembered in his lasting favour that by proving a patrician ancestry, he not only guarded against the possibility of seeing his patent revoked—an unconscionable dishonour to a Corsican—but also assured to his sons and daughters the best possible education at governmental expense, as so-called King's scholars. If, as we are assured on high authority, the Corsicans were genuine democrats to a man, we may be certain that Charles Bonaparte was moved to make his ancestral pretensions rather that his children might benefit, than for any advantage he was likely to derive himself from

doing so. We are not aware, at all events, that anyone has ever accused a single member of the Imperial family of having shown traits of that social meanness which goes by the name of snobbery. The patent of nobility granted to the House of Bonaparte by the Government of Louis XVI. was made out, it may be said, not so very long ago, as family pedigrees count—namely, in 1771—a year which, Scotsmen will hardly require to be told, saw the birth of the author of Waverley.

We express a personal view, of course, when we venture the opinion that it is only the really new families that ever produce phenomenal types.[1] And by the term *new* we mean those families which have up till their production of a rare entity—*nigroque simillima cycno*—remained in quiet obscurity, unknown, not unhonoured, but unsung. Very old and well-known races of the world must necessarily have gathered in the process of the ages, not only experience, but also all the philosophic outlook—mostly sceptical, if not contemptuous and altogether pessimist—with which experience, in the long run, cannot fail to invest the wisdom of reflective men. Such a philosophy of scepticism is wholly adverse, however, to great

[1] We admit a certain vagueness here. Our opinion is based on the assumption that blood has no absolute standard, or specific type, but that the varieties of its quality must be as the number of human kinds and characters. Consequently the fusion, or combination, which is likely to produce a human phenomenon—and mankind has produced but a few, historically considered—would normally recur about once in every two or more cycles, as History has shown, we think. Assuming certain figures, it is a simple "probability" sum.

performance in any domain of human activity, seeing that in the longest space of time allotted to man, hardly more than the bases of any enduring fame can be securely laid. Who had heard—apart from Marius, himself not a Cæsar —of the family of Julius before the conqueror of Gaul had brought the Julian *gens* into prominence? What sort of men did Cromwell come from? Who was Luther's grandfather? How long were Aristotle's ancestors resident at Stagira? What were the Habsburgs doing before Rudolph's day? Or who, apart from a few musicians, ever heard of the Wellesleys before Wellington's age? Or of the Churchills before the days of Marlborough? We are of opinion, consequently, that Nature provides her portents from especial fusions of new blood based on the selective principle. This idea leads, of course, to the conclusion that no man who is not especially called to great performance can by any labour of his own achieve a high destiny, or renown. Nor do we think that opportunity, or environment, or luck, or any other of many moot conditions can explain the advent of an overwhelming personality in the world. Blood—the wonderful juice, as Goethe called it—seems to us to provide the key to the mystery of individual phenomenalism on the earth, and it appears to be new blood at that. All of which leads us to the view that there is really nothing subjective in creation, and that man is merely an instrument through which nature expresses itself and its design.

The story of the Bonapartes and their origin appears to be a case in point. It seems to be established that the tribe of Buonaparte cannot trace a clear descent, under that name, before the twelfth century. It was only during the quarrels of the Guelphs and Ghibellines that families came to be known either as members of the *good side* or *buona parte*, or as members of the *mala parte* or *bad side*, entirely according to the political point of view of the particular partisan. The Bonapartes, as a result of these quarrels, issued with the patronymic *Buona Parte* for their family name. What it had been before those days no one apparently knows for certain, though, of course, conjecture is not wanting; some genealogists tracing their origin to the hereditary Roman Cæsars, others to the Byzantine Cæsars, some giving them affiliation with the Orsini and Colonna houses, while others go back the whole way to the great House of Macedon. But if the original family had been of high standing or great antiquity, there would have been no possibility of its concealing itself, for any political reason, under the generic sobriquet of a faction. Hence we are inclined to the view that the original Bonaparte tribe was either of the modest middle classes, or else of the nameless or foundling type, and consequently belonged to the *new* type which we have tried to suggest. All honest attempts to trace their ascent before the twelfth century to the Janfelds, *podestà* at San Stefano, or to Castruccio Castracani, the dictator of Lucca,

have been unsuccessful. Indeed we have nothing positively certain of the Bonaparte family until they had become fairly settled in Corsica, and the first public document which bears the signature of a Bonaparte is dated 14th May 1485—about the time when Richard III. was making his last stand for the crown of England.

The Bonapartes moved to Ajaccio about the first decade of the sixteenth century, where a certain Francis Bonaparte was generally known to his fellow-citizens as the Moor, whether from his bronzed complexion, or from the fact that he had served under Ludovico Moro, we know not. He had a son Gabriel who served in the Genoese mercenaries and afterwards became a priest and subsequently a canon of the diocese. An illegitimate half-brother of this gentleman, Luca by name, once had his face severely slapped by an Ornano in the streets of Ajaccio. He waited some years for his vendetta and then murdered the assailant on the steps of his home, affixing the offending hand, pierced by a dagger, to a panel of the hall-door. Blood of this particular *cuvée* cannot but have contributed to the formidable personality of the great descendant. Even up to 1550 the Bonapartes considered themselves, as immigrants from Liguria, to be of much superior stock to the islanders, and one Jerome Bonaparte, a son of the aforesaid Gabriel, the priest—whom we may charitably suppose to have become a widower before he took Orders—appears about 1579 as a strenuous supporter of

a kind of social and political *Pale* which was established to the exclusion of the islanders and in favour of the immigrants from the mainland. One Pozzo di Borgo took up the cause of the islanders, and thus prepared the way for a political vendetta which was to declare itself on a higher level, more than two centuries later, between descendant members af the same two clans.

This Jerome Bonaparte, a lawyer by the way, married the daughter of a prosperous landed proprietor, whose inheritance he added to by lucky speculations as well as by successful claims to property formerly in the possession of his bride's family. It is about the time of this worthy that we find the Bonaparte tribe engaged in the wine and corn trades, among them Augustus Bonaparte, brother of Jerome, who was also an elder of the community of Ajaccio, and once distinguished himself by cornering the bread supplies to his own personal profit. For the most part, however, the Bonapartes engaged in the profession of attorney, a business calculated, we suppose, to give its practitioners more than ordinary opportunities for studying human nature. The Corsican attorney of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was, moreover, a man of considerable prominence in his community and corresponded, in a large measure, to the municipal solicitor of our own time, his rôle being socially, politically and commercially of first-class importance within his own environment.

The profession required much energy in those

days, for the local attorney counted for something in little things as well as big. Even the hiring out of a dun cow or the sale of a little patch of land required a contract. However modest their means, a Corsican couple would scorn to enter into the marriage contract without first visiting a lawyer. And even promises of marriage were registered at his office, for the failure of one of the two contracting parties to keep the plighted word would inevitably mean a bloody family feud. Then the office of the lawyer was the especial rendezvous of the *parolanti*, or interveners, the people who undertook to settle matters, to talk the other fellow over, or to compromise a quarrel, or even to bring together the parties to a vendetta, in order to debate the question whether, after all, there was any real motive for vengeance on either side—the results of all such matters being duly recorded by the essentially impartial pettifogger who, of course, did not fail to collect his honorarium. He also it was who engrossed the petitions sent up to the higher powers by the little people, and if a man thought his *forte* was that of street-sweeping, the lawyer drew up his formal request to the municipal authorities and forwarded it with his own recommendation to the proper quarter. A notorious bandit of veteran standing, anxious to make his soul, as the saying is, and desirous of seeing the old home before he died, would send an agent to the lawyer from his mountain lair, offering to surrender to the civic

powers a portion of his plunder, provided his previous offences were condoned and the ban of legal excommunication removed. On another occasion the attorney might draw up a deed after the following fashion :—

"The noble and magnificent Giuseppe Carbone having on May 5 slain a bandit, and having therefore acquired the right, according to the civil and criminal statutes of the island of Corsica, to designate for reprieve any other bandit now under sentence of death, desires that clemency shall be extended to Carolo Perfetto recently convicted of murder and perjury."

The noble and magnificent Carbone, having performed this act of justice, returns home with a clear conscience, not unmindful of the fact that he has assured himself a firm ally in Carolo Perfetto, should he ever require assistance in a little matter of blood-letting, or even in a case where well-considered perjury would be likely to help his fortunes over the rough spots.

Francis Bonaparte succeeded Jerome as the lawyer of Ajaccio, but does not appear to have added to the family wealth, and it would appear that from 1625, when this ancestor sold the property of La Villetta, near Ajaccio, the territorial possessions of the Bonapartes began to dwindle very rapidly. In 1632, indeed, the record shows that he was forced to pledge a small golden relic, with his arms engraven on the same, for about twelve shillings. Francis was, in due course, succeeded by his son, Sebastian Bonaparte,

whose eldest, Charles, became the father of Joseph Bonaparte. This worthy married a daughter of the squirearchic Corsican family of Bozzi in which the baptismal name Napoleon was common and whose ancestors had served under the French King Henri II. when the English lost Calais in the middle of the sixteenth century. This is the point at which the Italian Bonaparte stock receives its first infiltration of pure Corsican blood: by the small but ancient territorial properties which enter into the family with that alliance, the Napoleons become Corsicans of Corsica, and the old prejudices of the Genoese *Pale* pass for ever. A son of this marriage, Sebastian Nicholas, became the husband of Maria Tusoli, a daughter of one of the fiery factionaries of the island and also a Corsican of the purest blood. They had three children, Joseph, Napoleon and Lucien, and from the marriage of the first of these, Joseph, with Maria Paravisino, sprang Charles Bonaparte, the father of the mighty Napoleon. Letitia, his wife, was of the Ramolini tribe, whose ancestors were squires of Istria and officers in the armies of Venice.

It is clear, therefore, from all which precedes that at no point of the known line do there appear to be any conditions which might contribute to a transmission of artistic leanings in the Bonaparte family. On the contrary, everything seems to mark the men out for professions which are the extreme opposite of anything artistic; while the women, wholly unlettered and in the

main somewhat *paysannes* in speech, in manner and in their meticulous housewifery, seem to be chosen for their "points" and as likely in all cases to "throw" healthy children. All their men, indeed, are apt and clever animals and all their women unfailing breeders, the only spiritual tendency observable in any of the stock being the insistence with which each father decides that the sons shall have the best possible scholarly education, without which, they are fully well aware, no inferior can climb to higher social rank.

"The Bonapartes," says de Rocca, in effect, "were not the richest people in Ajaccio; they were not even the best-born. On their arrival there, they occupied a very modest position in the town, but had derived from their Genoese ancestors that taste for letters and learning without which no man can change his condition in life. Beside this individual ambition we find a kind of racial ambition, a patient seeking for self-perfectioning which maintains them on a level above their contemporaries. In their little sphere they distinguish themselves by qualities of culture which raise them even when their means are disappearing. This solicitude for the family's future displays itself in the anxiety and craftiness with which they seek out patrons and protectors for their children; as, for example, in their choice of prosperous and well-placed godfathers and godmothers for their offspring.

"This *esprit de foyer*, this tenaciousness of the Bonapartes in moving all influences in order to

assure to their children a better place in life, this tireless object from generation to generation—all such effort is seen at its highest in Charles Bonaparte, whose son, Napoleon, is marvellously served by fortunate circumstances in his beginnings: he is just noble enough to qualify for a king's cadetship and a free education which will be much superior to anything which his rivals, the Republican generals, will have received. Thanks to the democratic community from which he springs, he cannot, when the Revolution begins to decimate them, be accounted one of the officers of the *ci-devant.* Had he come from Touraine, he could never have gone through the reign of terror and not been proscribed. It is the Corsican spirit of the clan which makes Napoleon give a throne to his brothers and sisters, and he distributes crowns among them just as the Corsican elders distribute their civic patronage among their own kith and kin. Without seeking to decide what Napoleon owed in his mental formation to his ancestors of Corsica and Liguria, we may say that the foresight of his fathers prepared him for his destiny, while his native island furnished him at once with the elements of his grandeur and his destruction."

The true Corsican's mania of superiority obsessed the Emperor to the end of his days, as his judgments of all great men clearly show, and we have covered much ground in our quest of a single criticism of any great historical character, which might be said to possess an impartial ring.

" Napoleon," declared Madame de Rémusat, " was jealous of all the great men of the world. He feared all signs of superiority and few who were near him ever failed to hear him express a predilection for mediocrities."

When at St Helena his secretary, Baron Gourgaud, once mentioned Louis XI. and Henri IV. as being possible rivals in respect of personal popularity in France. The fallen Emperor answered, as the Baron tells :

" Saint Louis was an ass ; a just man, if you will, but he never achieved anything worthy of note. And as for that goat's-beard Henri IV.—he was an old fool. Louis XIV. was certainly the greatest King of his race. He and myself alone will count in our history ; only he and I had such great armies," and he does not fail to point out that Napoleon differed from Louis in one important consideration—namely, that the former commanded his legions in person, and that the Roi-Soleil was never anything but a *chef de parade.*

The Emperor does not deny that Alexander, Hannibal, Cæsar, possessed " qualities." Nevertheless his criticism of their various campaigns goes to indicate that their wars possessed nothing of the splendour and *éclat,* whether in conception or results, of his own. Alexander, he admits, calculated profoundly, executed boldly, led with judgment ; but " we cannot point in the case of the Macedonian to any manœuvre which can be said to be worthy of a great general." Alexander appears to be simply a brave soldier—a grenadier

like Léon Aune, this guardsman being about the equivalent of our own famous Shaw of the Household Cavalry, who fell at Waterloo. Hannibal he admits to have been the boldest and most audacious of all the conquerors of Antiquity—so adventurous, so sure, so great in all things, as he says of the Carthaginian who had crossed both the Pyrenees and the Alps.

"Yet, *voyez-vous*, this march of Hannibal from Collioure to Turin was quite a simple matter—a mere holiday tramp; and as for the difficulties of the passage of the Alps, why, there were really none," is a commentary reported by Damas Hinard in his *Opinions de Napoleon*, vol. i., p. 79. Contrary to accepted historical opinion, which places (we think) the Carthaginian, as a patriot and a strategist, higher than all other conquerors, whether modern or ancient, Napoleon declares him inferior to Turenne and Condé, a comparison which would place him on a plane about equal to that of Marlborough. Turenne would, had he suddenly arrived on the field of Wagram, have at once understood the tactical dispositions, Napoleon explains. But not so Hannibal.

In regard to Cæsar, whom the world has long been taught to look upon as the nearest known approach to the perfect prince among men: Napoleon deals with the Roman Colossus in an especial manner, for Cæsar, he thinks, is the only spirit of all time that in any way challenges his own glory. Cæsar, too, is inferior as a general to both Turenne and Condé and, *par conséquent*,

much less than the victor of Austerlitz. And Gourgaud shows us how the Emperor even envies the great Julius his renown as an historian; for after dictating a series of commentaries to his secretary, he turns to the latter, saying:

"There you have something worth more than Cæsar's. He gives no dates; I do." And, we are assured by Hinard, the Emperor disliked to be told that it was Cæsar's habit to take his ordinary rest on the night preceding a great battle.

As for Gustavus Adolphus, the only respectable commander produced by the Thirty Years' War, in our opinion:

"In eighteen months," pooh-poohs Napoleon, "this wonder gained *one* battle, lost another and was killed in a third. They are, indeed, not wrong who say that history is a romance. Men still talk of the wondrous exploits of this Swede, and of ourselves they will say—perhaps nothing! Yet Gustavus added nothing to the technical science of war!"

And, again, Charles XII. was a man who showed no results for his career; the Maréchal de Saxe—the soldier who met the Bloody Duke at Fontenoy—was brave "but not by any means an eagle." Even Frederick the Great—to whom Napoleon surely owed his ideas about horse artillery—fails to meet with the approval of the Corsican, who declares in almost the same words which old Wurmser had used about himself in the Italian Campaign of 1796:

"Frederick breaks all the rules of war. What distinguishes him is not so much his skill in manœuvres as his audacity. There was nothing very fine in his tactics at Rosbach, and certainly he is not in the same class with Turenne. Frederick, for all his great military qualities, did not understand the proper use of artillery."

So, then, we see that Alexander is only brave and that Hannibal, Cæsar and Frederick are not on the same level as Turenne, Napoleon, of course, being, by construction, above them all. He is not more generous in dealing with his own lieutenants, whose glory he will only allow to reflect his own, as Madame de Rémusat tells us in her *Mémoires*, adding, "and if they distinguished themselves, he would say that they only did their duty." When Davout, who had just won the battle of Auerstadt, really the decisive factor in the Jena Campaign, met his Emperor at Headquarters, the day after, Napoleon, who had had sufficient time to compare and appraise the respective merits of Auerstadt and Jena, looked at his lieutenant very darkly, saying:

"Vous n'avez pas mal fait—You didn't do so badly."

He is careful, too, to move his generals from one force to another, in order that none shall become too popular with any particular army. There shall be no "X of the Army of Y," as there had been a Bonaparte of the Army of Italy—if Napoleon can help it. In speaking of Hoche, whom, with Marceau, French experts rate on a

level equal to all that Bonaparte proved himself to be in Italy, the Emperor declared that, had it come to a definite rivalry between them, Hoche would have been crushed. Moreau, Napoleon admitted, was the only general sprung from the Revolution who was capable of causing him any anxiety. Yet he gives no credit to Moreau for the victory of Hohenlinden, which, far more than Marengo—too distant from the campaign's real political objective, Vienna—decided the submission of Austria to Bonaparte's plans in 1800. Napoleon at St Helena described this great battle as a mere "rencontre heureuse," which—of course—disclosed no military talent.

Then there was Masséna—whom Disraeli, through the mouth of Sidonia, claimed as a fellow-Hebrew from the tribe of Manasseh: "Masséna," said Napoleon, "possesses military talents before which we must bow." This general, it will be remembered, fought a three-day battle against the Russians under Korsakoff, at Zurich, in 1799, defeated them and saved France from invasion. Yet when Masséna in 1804 wished to take the title Duc de Zurich, in memory of the exploit which had won him the admiration of all France, Napoleon declined to sanction the choice on the ground that the suggested title was too German for a good Frenchman! Masséna had to content himself with the dukedom of Rivoli, which recalled a first-class Bonapartian exploit. Thiébault, an admirer of the Emperor, tells us that the Corsican never quite forgave Masséna, who

among soldiers and the people, held a reputation hardly inferior to that of Napoleon himself, and in order to destroy the Marshal's prestige with the public, sent him to conquer Portugal with forces entirely inadequate for the object in view. Furthermore, in order to make any likelihood of his great lieutenant's success all the more remote, two hot-heads like Ney and Junot, men whom only Napoleon himself could command, were given him as coadjutors. Masséna, adds Thiébault, was too astute not to see through his master's motives, and at first refused to undertake the mission. Thiébault's conclusion is one that is of interest in these days of great military exploit:

"*Il semble que le harnais militaire est plus propice qu'aucun autre à provoquer, chez quiconque le porte, cette rage de gloire et cet entraînement à spéculer sur la défaite du rival qui porte ombrage.*"

To which we may add another opinion in point from the excellent Monsieur de Rémusat, who writes in the following strain, to his equally excellent wife:—

"It is amusing to hear these military men discuss one another; how they run each other down, showing, or seeking to show, for how much good luck counts in successes which are won; and tearing to shreds every reputation which outsiders like ourselves would have thought to be established on the most solid foundations."

Taine was assuredly right when he declared that all independence—even its possibility—offended Napoleon, and that he could tolerate

around him only such spirits as willingly hugged the chains of their slavery. Napoleon himself admitted his obsession more than once, and compared himself at times to an artist, or to a lover:

"I love power," he told Roederer, "but I love it as only an artist loves his art."

And on another occasion:

"I have only one passion and one mistress—France. I wake with her, I sleep with her. My only mistress is power, and I worked too hard in winning her, to allow myself easily to be robbed of her, or even to be envied for possessing her."

Or again:

"Ambition is so much a part of my temperament, of my constitution, that it has become the very blood of my veins and the very air which I breathe."

CHAPTER II

THE IMPERIAL STUDENT

Napoleon's Academic Training—The Curriculum at Brienne—The Classical and Language Course—On Literary Style—The Mathematical Studies—Religious Instruction—At the École Militaire—The Subaltern-Student of Auxonne—Importance of History—Formation of Literary Tastes—What Rousseau taught Napoleon—Machiavelli a Favourite—Was Bonaparte a Mason?—Some Literary Attempts—His "Heart's Library"—Some English Books

CERTAIN French writers, among them Monsieur Gustave Mouravit, agree in thinking that the psychic side of Napoleon is best divined from a study of his private libraries. Supposing this method to be a fair test of the intellectual or spiritual formation of an individual, we cannot fail to derive much profit from tracing his literary tastes back to the days of his early training at Brienne, where the young Corsican spent six years. French provincial colleges, whether military or civil, have not, even in respect of the various curricula followed, changed very much within the past hundred years or so, and those who have, as so many Britons now do, passed a few years in a congregational school on the Continent, will have no difficulty at all in reconstructing for themselves the Academy of Brienne, severe and semi-monastic, where the youthful Bonaparte began his first steps in polite learning. Then, as now, the so-called literary course began with the seventh, or grammar class, after which the pupil started his *cours d'humanités*. As a King's Cadet and an officer-to-be, young Bonaparte naturally chose the classical side, and in due course ascended through "Sixième Latine," Fifth, Fourth, Third, Second, to First, or "Rhetoric." Latin was an essential—though Napoleon in after life admitted to Wieland and Goethe that he was no great Latinist.

Roman authors read all varied according to the Forms, the lower taking very simple works

like those of Eutropius, or easy passages from the Selectæ or Colloquia of Erasmus, the Fables of Phædrus. The middle forms read the Lives of Cornelius Nepos—De Viris Illustribus, we presume, the Eclogues, Cæsar's Commentaries, Sallust's Jugurtha and Catiline. The higher classes read the Twenty-First Book of Livy, Cicero's Catiline and Pro Milone, the Odes and the Satires of Horace, the First, Second and Sixth Books of the Æneid, and the Fourth of the Georgics.

The pupils in Rhetoric, we are told, were taught that there were three kinds of Oratory—namely, (1) the judicial; (2) the demonstrative and (3) the deliberative. Three kinds of literary style—(1) the sublime style—"*dont l'écueil est l'enflure, fatras pompeux de paroles stériles*"; (2) the moderate style, like that of *Télémaque*, and (3) the simple style, of which La Bruyère was the chief model, and of which the literary professor of the Minimes acuminously observed: "*ce style est plus difficile à attraper qu'on ne se l'imagine.*" Literature was taught with evidently more care for the training of the pupil's cultivable mind than is the case in British Public Schools, and a satisfactory knowledge was required from each youth concerning the main characteristics and methods of thought and expression of Homer, Virgil, Lucian, Æsop, Phædrus, Theocritus, Milton, Voltaire, Tasso and Camoëns. Voltaire's *Essay on Epic Poetry*, passages from the *Death of Cæsar* and the *Henriade* were among the compulsory subjects, though Corneille, Racine,

Fénélon, Bossuet, Massillon, Fléchier and Boileau were naturally the favourite authors in this congregational academy. The oracle of the Minimes was Boileau. A work by the Abbé Vertot, entitled *History of the Knights of Malta*, was looked upon as a classic and was learned by heart; Greek and Roman history, lectures on the story of France from the days of the early kings and an account of the "prodigious conquests" of the British in India made up the History course. Geography was studied somewhat perfunctorily, though considerable attention was devoted to the British Isles. There was no mention of Physics or Natural History, but German was a fairly general subject and the Mathematical schools were good so far as they went, which was, for the highest Form, in Algebra, to Logarithms and the Theorem; in Geometry, to advanced studies of the Straight Line and Circle; in Trigonometry, to the Solution of Triangles.

Religious instruction was also given in the form of discourses on difficult points in the Catechism and, of course, there were classes in Bible History, which the students for the most part looked upon as the most tedious of all lectures. Napoleon was not lacking in piety, Chuquet tells us, when he first arrived at Brienne; but it is also certain that the general tone of the school towards religious matters was well calculated to kill any devotion he may once have entertained for the Church, and he left there a confirmed unbeliever, even as most of his con-

temporaries, who, after the manner of the *esprits forts* so fashionable in that age, affected, more especially in the upper lecture-rooms, to ridicule all matters connected with spiritual belief. It will interest those who have experience of this kind of foreign school-life to learn that the most popular professors among the priests were those who went through the daily Mass with the greatest dispatch. Thus a certain Père Château, for example, was able to gallop through the ceremony *au pas de charge*, taking only four minutes and a half to celebrate a " dead " mass ; a certain Père Berton, an ex-grenadier, by the way, was a good second favourite, with a record of from nine to ten minutes ; while a very old stager, Père Génin, could even beat the Missal in less than fourteen minutes by the clock.

On leaving Brienne and proceeding to the Military College in Paris, young Bonaparte's studies concerned themselves almost wholly with technical acquirements, and if the Corsican devoted much time to other reading, we are not informed of the nature of the works which engaged his interest. It was not until 1785, when he was already a subaltern in the artillery, that he read Rousseau's *Confessions* which, he afterwards admitted, much affected his world-philosophy at the time. It seems a startling fact in these days of rapid military promotion, but it is true that Bonaparte remained for over five years a second lieutenant before he received his first step. During these years—which were divided between

his regimental service and Corsica—the young subaltern gave himself up to all kinds of study which was likely to contribute to his intellectual formation, including original literary work.

"My sense of time-economy was always large," he declared subsequently to the Prince-Primate at Erfurt, "and even when I had nothing to do, I was quick to realise that I had no time to lose."

When on garrison duty at Auxonne, he read scores of historical works, including, as he tells us, Marigny's *History of the Arabs*, several works dealing with the government of Venice, Buffon's *Natural History*, Mably's *Observations on the History of France*, a work on Frederick the Great, Baron Tott's *Souvenirs of Turkey*, Barrow's *History of England*, Mirabeau's *Lettres de Cachet*, Plato's *Republic*.

The literary tastes of Napoleon may be said to have formed themselves during his garrison years from 1785 to 1791, and the possession of an extraordinary memory helped him to retain all that he read. It was about this time, too, that he began to show his preferences in regard to the theatre. He was no lover of the play of the comedy-of-manners type, and even of Molière's plays he could say that they were mere drawing-room gossip—*commérage de salon*. His idea of the educative in the drama was based upon the stern realities of life, on destiny and on all those conditions of existence which reveal men unto themselves and force them to fight against the adverse fate which is ever ready to overwhelm

the resigned and the supine. Like all true Italians, he was a lover of Tragedy, and it is a matter of record that himself, Joseph, Louis, Lucien and their sister Elisa enacted many of the masterpieces of Corneille and Racine at one time or another in private. Voltaire, Napoleon always held, was deficient in a proper understanding of men, their motives and their passions, and failed —like Tacitus—to appreciate the real nobleness which invariably inspires the ambitions and enterprises of all great men. *Paul et Virginie* attracted his interest in these days, as naturally did Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois*. Men who associated with him at that time tell us how it was his habit to read aloud and so improve his French accent, which always remained bad—so much so indeed that sergeants, in reading the military orders of the day, used to mimic his pronunciation and say *enfanterie* for *infanterie*, and emphasise the *ton nasillard* which characterised their young Corsican officer.

Rousseau, the author of the *Social Contract*, of the *Confessions* and of *Emile*, counted for much in forming his philosophic outlook about this period, and helped him to attain that clear insight into men's character which distinguished the great intellectual rebel himself. In the days of Auxonne he thirsted, like Rousseau, after Justice and Liberty, fully agreed with Emile that "society was bad and much corrupted by excessive civilisation," and sighed for the purity of character which he found among the heroes of

his favourite Ossian. And strong with the idea that the Corsicans were the modern types of the ancient Gaelic warriors, he decided to write a history of his native island. In 1789 he translated Boswell's Account of Corsica and concluded from a searching study of Cromwell that "revolutions provide a good opportunity for men who have audacity and courage." His study of Machiavelli pleases him, and from that philosopher he takes a phrase which is afterwards to help him generously on his life's journey:

"It is better to be brutal with Fortune than to approach her with respect; for Fortune is a woman, and he that seeks to win her must use violence rather than diplomacy."

All and everything touching on the campaigns of the great captains of the world helps to fill up the busy days of mind-building, and he comes to the conclusion as a result of his researches in military history that:

"In the last analysis, it is the soldier who governs; one can only master a horse with boot and spur." The horse meaning, of course, the People.

Chuquet is of opinion that Bonaparte became a Mason about the Valence period, and draws the conclusion therefrom that at any rate he had ceased to be a Catholic on taking up his commission; a point of view which overlooks the fact that at the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century—the Age of Reason—Freemasonry counted all sorts and

conditions of prominent men within its fold, many of whom outwardly professed anti-Masonic religions and many who followed none at all. There is little doubt, in any case, that he was as favourable to Freemasonry as he was at heart antipathetic to Jewry, and in all probability had been initiated at some time or other into the lower degrees. About 1790, Lucien tells us, he wrote an essay in which, as Voltaire in his own day had done, he sought to show that the life and teachings of Apollonius of Tyana—a mystical contemporary of Christ—exceeded in their influence on the then existing world all that which had been exerted by the Bethlehemite.

It was in 1791 that the Academy of Lyons decided to award a prize, equal in value to about £60 of our own money, for the best essay dealing with the essential conditions of human happiness. The young officer—then in his twenty-third year—became a candidate for this award, and in due course sent in his contribution, the sentiments of which indicated his revolt against the animalism of Rousseau, who maintained, it will be remembered, that food, a female and rest were all-sufficient for a man's happiness. Bonaparte advocated the necessity of reasoned sentiment in the world as the proper inspiration of social happiness and progress—sentiment being the *principium* of society and reason the force which held it together. Self-isolation was opposed to nature; sympathy was as much a craving of man's soul, as food for his body; action was

always superior to philosophy, even as sane enthusiasm is always above philosophic indifference, and reasoned self-expression is, *en somme*, the end of each man's life—these are, in effect, some of the points of view he advances as requisite for his new Utopia. He did not win the prize which was declared to be, if somewhat discursive, at least full of sound philosophy. The winner was Denou, eight years older than Bonaparte, a man who subsequently played a prominent rôle as a politician and an intellectual on a lower stage than his vast contemporary.

In 1793 Commandant Bonaparte, of the 12th Battery of La Fère, published at his own expense his *Souper de Beaucaire*, a discussion, between five typical representatives of the social body, which treated of the existing political situation in France, and with especial reference to the city of Marseilles, which then aspired, it would seem, to play in Europe the rôle which had once belonged to oligarchic Venice. That such a condition of affairs could exist, indicated clearly the inherent weakness of the French Government, and the military representative at the Beaucaire supper-table—Bonaparte, of course—goes on to show that France can be saved only by a vigorous policy which shall prove acceptable to the whole of the nation, provided it be able to assert itself and re-establish order everywhere—a policy in which the sword must be allowed to play a capital rôle, given the conditions of the day, suggests our pragmatical officer, as we might presume. This

pamphlet went the way of the majority of *écrits de circonstance*; it made no sensation in the world, and a day was to come when Napoleon could use bad language on his hypercritical and caustic brother Lucien reminding him of certain of the popular sentiments he then advanced.

"Oubliez-le," he would shout at the mocking Lucien; "oubliez-le—forget it!"; and then goes on to lecture him on the virtue of gratitude among brothers.

In concluding this chapter, we think it well to mention that the fallen Emperor's library at St Helena was bequeathed to the Duke of Reichstadt. It contained somewhat fewer than 500 volumes, which, we may suppose, were the favourite works of the wonderful soldier—his "heart's library," to which the great disrated could turn at any time for recreation, forgetfulness or consolation. The first masters of French literature were nearly all represented, for a part if not all of their masterpieces, and there lies not a little pathos in the fact that the works on which his youthful mind had fed at Brienne ever held the first place in his interest. Historical tomes were numerous, and among English books we find a translation of Gibbon, a translation of *Paradise Lost* and Hamilton's *Memoirs of de Grammont.* There is also a Bible in eight volumes and a history of Bonaparte as First Consul, in three volumes. These apart, it is History—History everywhere, the story of human action to which he was to contribute so vast a chronicle himself.

At the death of the Duke of Reichstadt, in the third decade of the nineteenth century, all these volumes passed into the possession of the Emperors of Austria, and are now shelved in the vast Hofburg Library in Vienna in a special section devoted to the legend of this mighty adversary of the House of Habsburg.

CHAPTER III

THE IMPERIAL CRITIC

Frenchmen and Corneille—Value of Napoleon's Criticism—His Literary Likes and Dislikes—His Opinion of Corneille and Molière—A Discussion of Tragedy—Napoleon and Raynouard—Concerning Voltaire—A Reading by Talma—Napoleon and the Public Taste—Love and Tragedy—A Literary Ghost—The Emperor's Criticism of the Æneid, Book II.—His Opinion of the Iliad—Dislike of Shakespeare—A Hypercritical View

FRENCHMEN are agreed, we think, in assigning to Corneille the place which Englishmen give to Shakespeare, or Germans to Goethe; and, as every schoolboy knows, in France, England and Germany, there may be found large bodies of opinion which, excluding all possible competitors, home or foreign, accord their champion, as against the rest of the world's *illuminati*, a position corresponding to that which certain theological universities are wont to confer on their most distinguished scholar — namely, the degree of *Solus*. Although we prefer to leave to profounder judges of the literary arts all decisions in matters of this nature, and though far from accepting the literary criticism of the great soldier as possessing much value beyond that of an extraordinary judge of human nature and human motives, we maintain, nevertheless, that the judgments of so important a student as Napoleon may always be placed with, at least, corrective results beside those of really competent professional critical judges, and competent critics, it may be said, are nearly as rare as Napoleons. As he has assured us himself, Napoleon was no great admirer of Shakespeare; his regard for Goethe we have dwelt upon in another chapter, and shown that it was based partly on the psychological study of *Werther* and partly on the second-hand opinions, given to him by Talleyrand, by Lannes and by other men of purely political affairs, regarding the tremendous prestige that the Sage of Weimar

enjoyed among the conservative elements of Germany, which then, as now, made the most of its chosen literary instruments.

Shakespeare, said Napoleon, in effect, would never have enjoyed the universal renown which was his, had it not been that Voltaire, an exile in England desirous of flattering Englishmen, introduced the study of the English dramatist to Frenchmen. *Hamlet*, the exile boasted, he only saw played once in his life, *Macbeth* twice, *Othello* once, and what he had seen of Shakespeare had not encouraged him to further study of the English style of drama. On the other hand, he had seen *Le Cid* eight times, *Polyeucte* six times, *Cinna* twelve times, *Œdipe* nine times. The English dramatist he considered to be lacking in political insight and to possess a genius which was more applicable to the study of bourgeois or provincial situations and conditions than adapted for intrigues enacted on a grand and imposing plane, and held that the colonising gifts of the British, by spreading the English language, had done more towards universalising the Bard of Avon than any intrinsical genius shown by his works.

"Corneille was, on the contrary," said Napoleon, "at the supreme head of all the tragical poets of all time. He had divined the real nature of politics, and had he been trained to affairs, would have made a great statesman. It is not his versification that I admire most, but his great sense of actualities, his vast knowledge

of the human heart, the profundity of his political *nous*. France owes to the sentiments which he has voiced many glorious results. The fatalism of the ancients Corneille has replaced by the reasoned philosophy of State-politics, and he is the only one among the poets of France who has seized upon this truth. Had he lived in my time I would have created him a prince." So enthusiastic, indeed, was the Emperor for the great French poet that at one time he expressed his intention of ennobling the living descendants of Corneille and of granting them suitable pensions for the maintenance of their dignity.

Of Molière's comedies he was no great admirer, since tragedy, in his opinion, was the only form of the drama which had a really educative value, or any inspiration worthy of the name. *Tartuffe*, he admitted, however, to be one of the masterpieces of the stage, yet a piece for which he would not himself have granted a theatrical licence, owing to the way in which it ridiculed devotional piety. Racine he esteemed very highly, and had witnessed *Bajazet* seven times, *Iphigenie* ten times, and *Phèdre* on an equal number of occasions. *Mithridate*, in respect of its famous plan of campaign, he declared to be worthless, although as a work of art this drama appealed to him, Racine representing, in his view, on the whole, the somewhat "easy-going philanthropism" of the latter half of the seventeenth century.

Raynouard's *Templiers* he witnessed three times, and disapproving of it for political reasons, com-

manded the author to come to the Tuileries in order to discuss Tragedy with him. The character of King Philippe-le-Bel, in this piece, had, it may be said, been depreciated, although in the opinion of the Emperor he had been a good King and France had not been too rich in good monarchs. He had, said Napoleon, been the first to put the Pope in his place, and had worked for the people in his attempt to destroy the Order of the Templars—composed mainly of younger sons and possessing the third of the kingdom's wealth—which had ceased to possess any utilitarian value, but had become dangerous to the State. The Emperor's conversation with Raynouard throws an interesting light upon his conception of the drama.

"You should have represented the King," said Napoleon, "in the act of declaring to a Council of his Ministers that he intended to abolish the Order. The Grand Master would then refuse to dissolve the Brotherhood and Philippe would finally be compelled to sentence him to death."

"My conception," replied Raynouard, "was to make the King a weak character in order to enhance the dramatic situation by leaving the spectator in doubt whether the King would prove harsh or merciful to the Order—whether he would suppress it, or not."

"But," objects the Emperor, "the King in this case represents the nation, and the nation is opposed to the Templars, who are a band of oligarchs working for their own interest and

against that of the people. The latter must, therefore, be on the side of their real representative—the King. Your correct dramatic situation would have been to show Philippe bringing about a magnificent and spectacular *coup d'état* by abolishing a veritable *imperium in imperio*. A King of France can be put on the stage only to be admired. Again, you must get this point into your head—namely, that Politics plays in modern drama the rôle that Fate played in the drama of the Ancients."

And the Emperor goes on to show where the poet's technique fails in the following lines which Philippe addresses to the rebellious Grand Master :—

> " Choose between my clemency and my hatred—
> The scaffold awaits you ! "

" That," cries Napoleon, " is altogether wrong ! A King does not talk of his hatred, but of his justice. He may consign to the scaffold, but never talks of one."

On the subject of *Brutus*, the work of Voltaire, whose style the Emperor declared to be full of turgidity and tinsel (*de boursouflure et de clinquant*) and whose temperament was incapable of understanding men and matters, or the movement of the passions, Napoleon said :

" The Romans were guided by the love of their country, just as we are by our honour. Now, Voltaire does not depict the true sublimity of Brutus sacrificing his children, despite his own

agony, for the safety of Rome; he makes of him a monster of pride sacrificing them at a great crisis solely to the glorification of his own name. The whole tragedy is of a kind, and Lucretia becomes a madwoman who almost glories in the seduction which must make the ages talk of her."

And of the same author's *Mahomet* he tells us that the Prophet is nothing better than an impostor who might have been brought up at the Ecole Polytechnique; he is made to murder his father—an entirely wrong idea, says Napoleon, who adds that really great men are never cruel without necessity. Altogether Voltaire's *Mahomet* is too little for Napoleon, who gives instructions on one occasion to Monsieur de Fontanes saying:

"*I* will reconstruct the plays and you can look after the versification."

Legouvé was another dramatist who came under Imperial criticism, when his *Death of Henri IV.* was submitted to the Censor. Talma was commanded to read the play and the Imperial family, including Josephine, was present for the occasion. A line sonorously declaimed by the great tragedic actor awakens the Imperial ire. It runs:

"Je tremble—je ne sais quel noir pressentiment. . . ."

This is too much for Napoleon's conception of kingliness; he interrupts Talma at once, declaring that the phrasing must be altered:

"A King may tremble," he explains, "since

he is a man like other men; but he should never admit it."

The words are accordingly changed and Talma goes on to describe how some bloody villain creeps forward and plunges ten inches of dagger into the royal chest.

"Le pauvre homme! L'excellent homme!" cries Napoleon, with obvious after-thoughts, while poor Josephine, *très émue*, turns on the opportune tear.

A certain Nicolo Buonaparte, a resident of Florence, wrote a comedy in 1568, called *La Vedova* (The Widow), and Napoleon, with praiseworthy family pride, wished to have the play translated and produced in Paris in his day. It was found, however, that the work was far too indecent even for that age, and accordingly was not acted. Nevertheless, Napoleon made few mistakes in his judgments as to what the public really wanted, and the views of the people, dramatists always admitted, in nearly all cases coincided with those of the Emperor, a fact which may recommend itself to many psychologists of History, who tell us, with considerable cogency, that the great leaders of any epoch are almost invariably men who constitute in themselves a kind of résumé of the mentality and temperamentality of the age in which they live. Arnault once read his *Dom Pedro*, or *The Prince and the Peasant*, to the Emperor, who was far from charmed to hear an agricultural labourer giving counsel to a sovereign.

"Your peasant is a tribune of the Plebs," he told the author, "and I don't care for him." So, too, thought the first-nighters, who hissed the piece rather severely on its presentation. It was the opinion of the Corsican that Corneille alone knew how to make kings act and talk, verse being only the embroidery of the dramatic stuff, as he expressed it in his excellent native mother-wit. To Baour-Lormian, who had written a tragedy called *Mahomet II.*, Napoleon, disliking the piece, declared that love scenes were of no use in tragical pieces, and that the serious dramatist should rely on history rather than on romance for his effects. What the author wanted was large conceptions; the word-painting and the ringing phrase could wait.

We must not overlook the tradition that Napoleon was himself the composer of a tragedy called *Hector*, the authorship of which was said to have been officially attributed to an alleged literary ghost, Luce de Lancival. This gentleman, who had already written several plays, was without apparent reason one day given the Legion of Honour and a pension worth £300 a year. Some obscure pamphleteer sought in a publication to show that Lancival's *Hector* was really the work of Bonaparte himself, who had once wiled away the empty hours of his incarceration in the Temple, many years before, in composing this tragedy. On attaining to supreme power he resurrected his lucubration, confiding it to Lancival for alterations and repairs. The

dramatist did all that was required of him, tenderly edited *Hector* and submitted it, in his own name, to the Théâtre Français, where it was swiftly turned down with Homeric honours. A few days afterwards, during a rehearsal, an aide-de-camp arrived at the theatre with the following letter addressed to the director :—

"The mummers (*histrions*) of the Théâtre Français will immediately start rehearsing the tragedy *Hector*, which they had the audacity and ill-taste to refuse. Signed : NAP." When we have added that the above story appears in a pamphlet entitled, *Bonaparte, his Family and his Court, by a Chamberlain malgré lui*, we think the credibility of this pamphleteer becomes a little more than suspect.

Brother Scots will be interested to hear that a play entitled *Edward in Scotland*, by Alexander Duval, was enacted in 1802, and the audience much applauded a scene in which the Pretender retorts to an English colonel, who proposes as a toast the death of all who support the Stuarts : "I drink the death of no man," says Charles James, and the public applauded, thinking of the exiled Bourbons, no doubt. Bonaparte went to see the play and Duval affects to think that the First Consul shed a tear over the sufferings of the poor Stuart exile ! Bourbon partisans who were present, like the Duc de Choiseul, took every available opportunity of making demonstrations, and Bonaparte had the play withdrawn. Some indication of the political temper of those days

is also shown in the extra-theatrical comedy which attended on the representation of a play called *L'Antichambre*, by Dupaty, in which the Consular court comes in for considerable ridicule, Bonaparte himself being mimicked, as well as members of his family. In his first anger the Consul sentenced the author to exile in San Domingo, but pardoned him as he was taking ship at Brest for the West Indies.

The Imperial critic on one occasion delivered his opinion of Virgil in the following words :—

"The Second Book of the Æneid is held to be the masterpiece of this epic, and it certainly deserves the reputation, considered from the point of style. I cannot, however, rate it very high from other points of view. Thus, the wooden horse may have been a popular tradition, but to introduce it into an epic poem is ridiculous and entirely unworthy of a grandiose theme. You will find nothing like this in the Iliad, where everything conforms strictly and truthfully to the real practice of war. How can we imagine the Trojans so stupid as not to have thought of sending a fishing-smack to the island of Tenedos, in sight of Troy, in order to assure themselves if the thousand ships of the Greeks had reached there, or if they were on their way to attack the city ? How can we believe that Ulysses and his friends were such fools as to risk putting themselves into the hands of their enemies by cribbing themselves in that ridiculous wooden machine ? And supposing the horse to have contained even

one hundred armed men—how could such a weight have been moved to the walls of Troy, across the bay and over two rivers which were overlooked by the very towers of the citadel?

"The tragic episode of the sons of Laokoon, however impressive, cannot excuse the absurdity of the narrative, which really shows that the destruction of Troy and the entire action of the Second Book were executed and accomplished within the space of a few hours—an achievement which must in practice have required at least a fortnight. Had Homer described the fall of Troy he would not have treated it simply as one treats the taking of a fort. Homer had seen war, whilst Virgil had simply thought out his ideas of war like a schoolmaster who knows his book. It took Scipio seventeen days to raze Carthage to the ground; and Moscow was burned out only after eleven had passed. The Third Book is but a copy of the Odyssey, while the Fourth lacks every agreement with the dramatic unities.

"The Iliad," said Napoleon, "is like Genesis and the Bible, and is for all time. Homer was at once a poet, an orator, an historian, a legislator, a geographer and a theologian. He is the Encyclopædist of his epoch. The universal approval which men have given him has been well won and I have always read him with enthusiasm. A contrast which much struck me in Homer was the coarseness of social habits and the ethical grandeur of ideas—heroes hunting

game and dressing their own food, yet moving worlds to vast endeavour with their eloquence."

And here finally is what the Emperor had to say of the Bard of Avon, whom he had read, we imagine, only through the medium of translations :

"Certain French people fall in love with England at first sight, and are willing to accept one single opinion as sufficing to settle finally the matter of England's literary glory. But Shakespeare was forgotten for two centuries even in England. It pleased Voltaire, then in Geneva and seeing much English society at the time, to praise the English poet in order to flatter his great friends from London. It became the fashion to call Shakespeare the greatest writer of all time. I have read Shakespeare, however, and can say that there is nothing in him which approaches either Corneille or Racine. It is impossible indeed to read his plays seriously. Myself I find them so feeble as to be almost pitiful. As for Milton, there is only his address to the Sun and a few other pieces which count for anything; the rest is mere rhapsody. And I much prefer Vély to Hume. France has no cause to envy England for anything; even her own citizens desert her as soon as they can."

Napoleon once objected to La Fontaine's famous fable of the *Wolf and the Lamb* on the ground that it taught might to be greater than right, and was consequently bad for children. It was

immoral, he further held, because the wolf was not choked when he devoured the lamb!

In History he stood out for Machiavelli, saying: "Tacitus wrote novels, Gibbon is a brawler. Machiavelli is the only historian worth reading."

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPERIAL THEATRE

Talma and Bonaparte—The Actor coaches the First Consul—The Emperor coaches the Actor—Friendly Relations of the Twain—Napoleon on Critics and his Love for Cinna*—Concerning Mademoiselle Mars and her Sister—An Unexpected Scene—Mademoiselle Bourgoin and Chaptal—An Imperial Rebuke*

IT is unfortunate that Talma, the Kean of the French stage, should have left us next to nothing in the way of records dealing with his long and uninterrupted intimacy with Napoleon whom he had known in the days which followed on the Toulon episode, when the young Corsican was an unemployed ex-commandant in Paris. There are letters extant—suspect, it must be added—in which the poor officer writes to the affluent and friendly actor, asking him if he has a few dollars (*écus*) at his disposal, and it is to Talma, we think, that young Bonaparte confessed that he had once put his watch in pawn for a couple of pieces of gold. Of all the celebrities on the stage of that period, Talma alone enjoyed an intimacy with Napoleon, which came near to that possessed by Duroc, the Earl Marshal of the Empire, and the only individual to whom the Corsican allowed the privilege of free brotherly speech with himself. The Emperor at St Helena gave the disclaimer to the many stories which charged him with having been a bad borrower, when he said that he and Talma only became acquainted in 1800. Talma also denied the suggestions. Others assert that they had known each other since 1790.

Whatever the facts, and they are not of very great importance, there is no doubt that in 1802 Talma began to pay very frequent visits to the First Consul, in the course of which, it is said, the great actor used to give the chief of the State

TALMA AS NERO

From an engraving

lessons in princely deportment, a course of instruction the real significance of which could not have escaped the astute Frenchman. Admirers of Bonaparte who attributed all god-like gifts to their hero, denied that the Corsican had ever sought instruction from an actor how to play the monarch, and if the lessons were ever given, it is to be feared that Napoleon was no very apt pupil, since sound tradition has it that he was the least graceful or imposing of princes in respect of presence and courtly bearing. Nor can it be said that Napoleon derived much benefit from Talma's lessons in elocution, for, to the end, the great soldier, whatever he may have been in private, or in the council chamber, was a failure as a public speaker—except on the eve of conflict. That the Corsican really took lessons in deportment and elocution from his great contemporary is, however, our own fixed belief, and we see no reason either for refusing to believe the fact or for holding Napoleon up to ridicule on this account. We have noted that, like the admirably thorough being he ever was, Bonaparte had studied out the essential character and personality of princes; and it is more than likely that he did not confine his study to learning only the half of his rôle.

On his own side, Napoleon was very free with instructions to the great tragedian. For example, after seeing Talma in the *Death of Pompey* in 1805, the Emperor—who had really been an emperor since 1800 and cannot be accused of too much anxiety to show his sense of the new honour

—addressed the actor as to his rôle in the following terms :—

" You work your arms too freely and are too full of gesture. The head of an empire is more economical of his movements ; he is fully aware that a sign is an order, that a look means death, and is therefore sparing of both. There is also in the play a verse the meaning of which escapes you, Talma, who seem to be too convinced, too sincere when you declaim the line :

" ' For me, who think a throne to be an infamy . . .'

" Cæsar, when he speaks these words, does not mean the least of them, and talks in this strain only because he is surrounded by Romans to whom he wishes to convey the idea that he has a horror of kings. He is, however, far from thinking the throne contemptible. On the contrary, it is the first object of his whole life. You must not make a Cæsar talk as a Brutus would talk."

Again, after witnessing *Britannicus*, Napoleon criticises Talma in the following words :—

" Your acting of Nero does not quite satisfy me, and in that rôle I should like to see more of the conflict between a bad character and a good education. You should make fewer gestures ; a nature like Nero's has little external show, being too self-centred. Nevertheless, I like the simple and natural forms which you have restored to tragedy. When men of exalted rank are moved by passion, their language becomes more energetic

without being less natural. For example, you and I are now conversing in an ordinary way; nevertheless we are making history."

When the First Consul becomes Emperor, Talma fears to present himself at the Imperial Court until the new sovereign, noticing his continued absence, asks if the great actor is angry with him for any reason. After which Talma presents himself and pleases Napoleon because he dresses in appropriate good taste for his courtly rôle. So Napoleon takes the opportunity of continuing his instructions to Talma, and we get the following monologue :—

"Talma, you often visit me, and you can see things as they are : Princesses deprived of their lovers, Princes who have lost their States, Kings degraded by war from their sovereign rank, Generals who aspire to and beg for thrones. Around me you can see fallen ambitions, never-ceasing intrigues and rivalries, sorrows and affliction—all covered with courtier-like maskery. Here, assuredly, is Tragedy enough for anyone; my Palace is full of it, and even I am myself the most tragical figure in this big cast of tragedy. Well now ! Do you see any of us strike attitudes, or affect the airs and poses of grandeur, or hear us cry out in our triumphs or in our anguish ? No, indeed ! We are all perfectly natural and speak just as ordinary men speak when moved by interest or by passion. And it was in just the same way that the great makers of history acted in their own day and in the process of their own

tragedies. There, now, you have something on which to meditate ! "

All of which makes the reader rather sorry for the actor to whom Napoleon thought it necessary to address so crude a sermon of banalities—if he ever did ; and we very much doubt it.

Talma once pretended to discern in the profile of Alexander the Great, as shown by a rare cameo, some resemblance to Napoleon—a likeness which certainly did not exist, if ancient coins tell the truth. The Emperor professed to be pleased and presented Talma with the cameo. Napoleon many times paid the great actor's debts—to a total amount, according to the Imperial account-books, of half-a-million francs, or £20,000. Certainly Talma was never guilty of ingratitude to the Corsican. In view of the number of knighthoods which have been distributed within later times to the various prominent actors and singers of our own age, by European sovereigns, it is interesting to learn from the *Memoirs* of Las Cases that Napoleon once declared it had been his intention to decorate Talma with the Legion of Honour, and that only the fear of a public outcry against such an official distinguishing of a mere actor caused him to alter his decision. It was from Talma that Bonaparte on his return from Italy to Paris purchased the *hôtel* in the rue de la Victoire—formerly rue Chantereine—and it was in this house that the actor made up a list of entertainers whom he suggested the General should take with him to Egypt : Rigel, a pianist of

note; Grandmaison, a poet; Villoteau, a baritone —the type of male voice which Napoleon most favoured, we may state—and Arnault, a dramatic poet and author of *Les Venétiens*, who admitted that the Corsican had collaborated with him in the composition of that play.

It was also to Talma, who had just presented his friend the poet Lemercier, that Bonaparte declared that criticism which was not constructive was of no value whatsoever, since, as he said, a valet-de-chambre can find words for simple or gratuitous criticism. One of the visitors objected that the matter of good taste might possibly be beyond the intelligence of a menial, and Napoleon answered :

" That is just another conventional term—good taste! What can the matter of good taste mean to a man who works on original lines as apart from novelty and the bizarre? To me it is of the last concern what another person thinks, especially in accidentals. Give me sound argument and sound thought and I am with you. I have tried to read Virgil, but he bored me, and Ossian I read simply because, like the waves of the sea and the winds of the forest, he represented rough Nature to me. French dramatists and authors attach too much importance to what the critics are likely to say of them, and the result is, they are handicapped by the fact that, on starting to write, their own natural expression is already suffocated. A great author must write to please himself and without regard to standards which

are only conventions set up by mediocrities who, possessing no *bel essor*, cannot get beyond the art-limitations by which they seek to fetter loftier spirits. That is why I place Corneille first among all French poetic dramatists; he had seen nothing of the great world and worked far away from the madding crowd. Yet who can approach him when he excogitates the heart of a prince, or the soul of a leader of men and presents him on the stage? Truth—the discovery of new truth—is originality, not novelty, not new affectations, not the setting-up of standards which come to-day and pass to-morrow. Human nature always remains the same; there were no conventions in the Garden of Eden."

To Constant, the great man's body servant, we owe the recollection that a volume of Corneille was always placed on the Emperor's table when a visit was paid by Talma, and Napoleon would open the tome at *Cinna* and frequently quote from that masterpiece the lines:

> "César, tu vas régner. Voici le jour auguste
> Où le peuple romain pour toi toujours injuste."

On another occasion Lemercier presented him with a copy of his play *Agamemnon*, which the Corsican criticised with great severity, declaring that it was entirely lacking in courtly sense.

"Strophus has no business to reprove Clytemnestra," he says. "Strophus is only a valet."

Lemercier objects: "Strophus is a friend of Agamemnon; he is a dethroned king."

"Psha!" returns the Imperial upstart; "at Court only the King counts. The rest are but so much valetry."

In Voltaire's *Mérope*, he objects also to the line:

"The first of all kings was a victorious soldier,"

and forbids Chaptal to allow that piece to be produced because, as he declared, the people had not intelligence sufficient to apprehend the real meaning latent in that truism. Said he:

"For me the man who raises himself to a throne from nothing, is the first man of his age. It is no question of luck, but only merit, on the one hand and recognition of merit on the other."

The relations of Napoleon with the two sisters called Mars are not very well established, though it is accepted as historical that on one occasion while in the company of the younger and more famous sister, Napoleon, at three o'clock in the morning, had his first epileptic stroke, the whole household, including the Imperial consort, being awakened to attend at the Emperor's bedside, where Josephine pretended to go into an hysterical fit at the sight of her hated rival, chasing the latter half-naked down the stairs to the entresol and threatening, according to the record, with much shrill vituperation, to "scratch her face," to "pull her hair," to "slit her nose"—all in the accepted style of the perfect lady who toils beneath the moon and sleeps beneath the sun.

Mademoiselle Bourgoin was another who passed under the notice of Napoleon. This damsel

was the paid mistress of Chaptal, who acted as Minister of the Interior at the time and was an intimate and frequent collaborant of the Emperor. Bourgoin once received—very unexpectedly—her summons to attend on Cæsar's pleasure, and on presenting herself near midnight at the Palace was shown direct to Napoleon's bedroom, where, to her consternation, she found Chaptal deep in statistical business with his Imperial master. Poor little Bourgoin, who misjudged the occasion, thought well to attempt a little coquetry on her own account, all the more so since Napoleon had not even turned his head to look at her. As she sought to attract his attention, the Emperor, without raising his head from the table, ordered her to—undress! The chorus-woman set about divesting and laid herself on the Imperial couch. Napoleon then made some pretence at finishing up for the night and retiring, whereat (says the chronicler) old Chaptal, small wonder, began to sweat at every pore of his body. The Emperor changed his mind, however, and with his Minister started on some new task which lasted a couple of hours. In the meantime the actress lay blinking in bed, much mystified by proceedings in which she was entirely counted out, considerably hurt in her woman's pride, and wondering where on earth *she* was to come in—and when, and how. At last the girl attempted a remark, but had hardly opened her mouth when Napoleon interrupted her brusquely:

"Get up and go home," he said. "I do not want you." And the séance closed.

The authority for this story is Chaptal himself in his Memoirs; nor does he fail to inform us that he sent in his resignation on the day following this studied and indeed cowardly outrage on the part of the Corsican, since the Minister was not in a position to defend himself. It is of Mademoiselle Bourgoin, by the way, that Napoleon at Erfurt made the remark to the Emperor Alexander:

"Visit that woman and to-morrow all Europe will know what your physical proportions are from the ground up. Besides, I am concerned about your health"—an exquisite remark which carries its own commentary with it.

When Mademoiselle Chameroi, a well-known dancing-woman at the Opera, passed to her reward, the Vicar of Saint-Roch refused to receive her coffin in his church or to celebrate Mass for the repose of her soul. Napoleon immediately instructed the Archbishop of Paris to suspend the Vicar for three months in order, as he said, to give him time to meditate on the fact that Jesus Christ had taught men to pray for poor sinners, and to cultivate the divine attribute of charity to all.

CHAPTER V

MADEMOISELLE GEORGE

Standards of Beauty—Lessing's View—George an Amazonian Type—Her Attraction for Bonaparte—Their First Meeting at Saint-Cloud—Affected Nervousness of the Actress—Napoleon as a Lover—Espionage of Talleyrand—Bonaparte criticises the Actress—His Generosity to George—A Visit to the Tuileries—Josephine's Fit of Jealousy—Napoleon's Coronation—George visits an Emperor—Napoleon and His Bonnes Fortunes—Where George disappointed her Lover—Her Veneration for Napoleon—A Costly Rendezvous

IF the author of the *Laocoon* was right, then we may readily agree that there are certain subjects that do not altogether lend themselves to the painter's art. When Helen raised her veil and thought that act a sufficient answer to the angry Senators who accused her of having brought calamity and devastation upon Troy, the lady showed that the opinion she entertained about her own beauty was not a poor one. But could the first of painters present the most easily satisfied among us with the picture of a Helen who might be admitted to be worth a ten-year war, or show us a beauty the very absoluteness of which must appeal to all tastes? Assuredly not; and we should ourselves prefer the poet to tell us of this miracle of loveliness, leaving it to the reader's imagination to conjure up the ideal of so fair a creature—although Lessing teaches otherwise. Portraiture has of course dealt, though not generously, with Mademoiselle George—correctly so spelled—a favourite mistress of Napoleon, and on contemplating various pictures which represent this actress, we are led to believe either that the Corsican's taste was poor, or else that the portraitists of that time were weak in reproducing their sitters. As represented by the various artists whom we have seen, George would seem to have resembled one of those handsome but hard-faced Irishwomen of the larger size, and the reader may not require to be told that certain profound experts in the anthropological science

have seriously questioned the absolute femininity of the woman of Ireland, the theory being that she suffers from an excess of masculine temperament.

Like the majority of women who have attained to lofty rank in the dramatic and singing profession, Mademoiselle George was born of actors and made her first appearance on the stage at five years old—about 1790. At the opening of the Consulate she was in her twenty-second year, and already possessed an important prestige among contemporary actresses—a prestige which was mainly due then, as it is now and ever was, to cleverly organised *réclame* or press-agency work. Her vogue among the stage-door brotherhood was great—much greater than she admits in her *Memoirs*—and it is to be feared, alas! that Marguerite-Josephine, to name her, had dropped the pitcher very early in life. When Bonaparte first met her she was the mistress-in-chief of a certain Prince Sapieha, and although she emphasises the fact that a maiden aunt used to look very carefully after her morals, there is valid ground for the presumption that this old virgin was herself really no better than she should have been. The First Consul first saw George as Clytemnestra in *Iphigenia*, and so pleased was he with the personality and performance of the young actress that he sent Constant —his valet!—to her house, after the play, with instructions to solicit her to call at Saint-Cloud on the following night—a fair sample of the Corsican's diplomacy in delicate matters of the kind.

George, at this point in her *Memoirs*, goes into a ridiculous description of her "emotions" on hearing from the body servant that the First Consul wished to meet her. We must respect the intelligence of the actress, however, when she tells us that her curiosity in regard to the young Conqueror overcame all other sentiments; for the feeble brain of an ordinary stage-woman could not have thought out this little bit of soul-analysis if she had not really felt it. She informs Constant of her willingness to wait on the Consul at the hour indicated. Then, she says, the whole night preceding her visit was one long misery. *What* could the First Consul want with her, she wondered. And besides, could *he* not come to *her*? Perhaps it would be better, after all, to write and decline, and then she tries to think what she ought to wear—white or pink; a *confection* or something muslin and simple? Oh, these dictators—what dreadful men they must be! And at last she drops off to sleep. About eight o'clock her maid awakes her, and noting Mademoiselle's bad humour, assures her that other rivals on the stage—Volnais, Bourgoin, Mars—would much envy her when they heard of her good fortune. George, somewhat consoled, orders her carriage for the Bois, visits her *coiffeur*, her tailor and goes on to the theatre, where she meets Talma—*mon bon Talma*. The actor and the manager, Fleury, both congratulate her, the latter with some *narquoiserie*, assuring her that she wears an air of conquest.

The actress goes home and arrays herself in what she describes as a white muslin *négligé*, a lace veil and a *cachemire*, and on arriving at the theatre, to wile the intervening hours away, meets the actress Volnais, who is also out for a rendezvous.

"Do you intend to see the whole play out?" says the latter, referring to the fashionable piece then being acted.

"No—will you?" asks George.

"Nor I," replies Volnais, "I have something on about nine o'clock"—meaning presumably that she was to meet General Junot, for the rendezvous was with him.

The Consular carriage called for George at eight o'clock, with Constant, the valet, in attendance, and the coachman was the famous César, about whom so many obvious jokes used to be made. It is a long journey to Saint-Cloud—four miles?—and Constant, under no illusions, presumably, as to the quality of this hardened actress's "trepidation," laughed when she told him that she felt very much humiliated—"which I thought somewhat impertinent on his part," writes the lady. On arrival at the Palace, Roustan shows her into—a large bedroom. As she nurses her nervousness, the First Consul makes his appearance—in white breeches, black socks, green uniform with red facings and the famous hat crushed under his arm. His first act was to tear her veil away and tell her that he had sent her £120 after hearing her in some recent play.

"I thought," said he, "that you might have come in person to thank me. But evidently you are proud as you are fair."

At this point the actress complains that the lights are too many for her, and Bonaparte summons Roustan to put most of them out, after which, as is usual with him, he wants to know all about her. George tells the story and does not conceal her relations with Prince Sapieha. The First Consul extracts a promise that she will visit himself occasionally.

"He certainly was pleased with me," writes George, "if he was not quite in love," adding simply: "I begged off on this occasion, but promised faithfully that I would return. He put on my veil for me and then kissed me on the forehead, at which I began to laugh, telling him he had kissed a present given me by Sapieha, whereupon he tore the veil into a thousand shreds and trampled on my shawl, took the ring from my finger, crushing it beneath his heel and even pulling off a little chain I wore. Then he summoned Roustan, ordering him to fetch a new veil and a shawl and telling me I was to wear only what he gave me."

This was the first interview with the First Consul, and Constant took the actress home again. In the course of the next day, Talma called on her and, in answer to her hesitations, told the actress that she must be very foolish not to take advantage of her good fortune. Like the good Frenchman he was, moreover, the actor

advised George, if she feared any embarrassments as a result of her liaison with Bonaparte, to get married right away. He persuaded her, in any case, to pay her promised visit to Bonaparte, and accordingly George returned to Saint-Cloud that night.

On this occasion Bonaparte, according to the actress, took great pains to spare her all shock to her sense of what was proper, and indulged in sentimental comedy to the extent of asking the young actress if she was not conscious of the electricity of love; finally putting the question: "Do you not love me a little?" George assures the chief of the State that she loves him not a little, but that his rôle in life is so large that she can only count for a small item in its evolution, and that although he is First Consul, she cannot allow him to trifle with her. She reminds him that they are playing *Cinna* on the next day, and that consequently she must be home betimes in order to get a full night's rest. Bonaparte reluctantly consents to her departure before (as he says) she has given him a proof of her willingness to be his friend, and insists that, *Cinna* over, his carriage shall take her back to Saint-Cloud, when he will expect her to sacrifice to Venus.

"He dried my tears," says Georgina, who promised to keep the appointment for the next day and again returned home.

Cinna was duly acted on the succeeding night, and Bonaparte was present. At the rendering of

the famous line, declaimed by Æmilia, the part taken by Mademoiselle George :

"I have seduced Cinna and can seduce others,"

the actress came in for some enthusiastic applause, at which, she says, she became purple, fearing that the Consul might accuse her of having been indiscreet. He was, on the contrary, very kind when they met at Saint-Cloud, where Bonaparte kept her till seven in the morning, himself acting as her servant when it was time for the actress to go—even to the extent of helping to rearrange the bed in which they had lain. The lady did not see her lover for some days, and then they met by arrangement in the woods of Saint-Cloud, when Bonaparte complimented her on looking so well by daylight, at the same time confessing naïvely enough that so many women had deceived him by candle-light. For a considerable period, the actress deserted her Prince for the First Consul, and it does not appear that the former became disconsolate, for during the first fortnight of their liaison he made no particular inquiries about his fair Georgina. In the honeymoon of their connection, Bonaparte, the actress tells, showed the greatest delicacy in his dealings with her. He was at once "violent and tender" —to quote the *hetaira*—never omitted to make their bed in the morning, helping her even with her toilet, putting on her shoes, and "as I wore silver garters which buckled and were

difficult to fix on, he had special garters ordered for me—of the elastic style."

About this time, too, the ex-Bishop of Autun, Monsieur de Talleyrand, began to be somewhat troublesome to her, Mademoiselle George tells us, and used to advise her to receive twice a week *à la grande mondaine.* The actress assured her diplomatic mentor that she was quite satisfied with the society of artists and had no ambition to shine in a circle so much above her own. Monsieur de Talleyrand, according to Georgina, was a meddlesome person (*tripotier*), and it was very hard to penetrate his motives, which, in this case, probably aimed at nothing higher than espionage upon the First Consul, the diplomatist being willing to allow the actress a small social rôle in return for inside information. Georgina, who appears to have been sincerely attached to Bonaparte to the very end of her days, soon acquainted her lover with his Minister's advances, and the First Consul was puzzled.

"What is that viper Talleyrand up to now?" he wonders. "He wants everyone to be as crooked as he is himself, and likes to make mischief everywhere. You are quite right to have nothing to do with society."

Bonaparte then criticises some rôle of hers in which she plays her part without passion, and advises her, if she wants to learn what the sentiments of a mother are like, to become one. The actress tells us, too, that Bonaparte once sent her to a *sage-femme* in the Faubourg in order to

learn from that worthy some of the secrets of maternity! A few days before his departure for the new camp at Boulogne, they spend a night together, playing like two children on the hearth-rug before the fire. Bonaparte tells the actress of his approaching departure, and fearing that she may want for money during his absence, stuffs several handfuls of bank-notes down her *corsage*, the amount, says the actress, being for £1600. On his return from Boulogne she visits him at the Tuileries, where the Consul has a private apartment at the top of the Palace, looking out over the great city. On making her way up to this *cabinet particulier*, Georgina drops an overshoe and sends Constant to fetch it, which he does. The Consul appears and is as kind as ever, nor does he fail, says the actress, to help her to undress and to dress again, acting with his natural sense of order, like a trained *femme de chambre*.

It was during one of the many visits of this actress to the First Consul that occurred the famous scene in which Madame de Rémusat shows how jealous of her great husband Josephine could be at times. On one occasion—well after midnight—Madame Bonaparte, strong with an intuition that the First Consul was not quite alone in his small apartment on the floor above, aroused Madame de Rémusat, her lady-of-honour, and with a lighted candle, the two women picked their way up the private staircase, Madame de Rémusat thoroughly ashamed, she tells, of the

rôle which she was forced to play. As the pair crept up the stairs, a slight movement was heard, and Josephine, seized with sudden fright, declares that it must be Roustan, the mameluke, a monster, she says, who is capable of killing them both at sight. This warning is quite enough for Madame de Rémusat, who turns about without further parley, escaping back to their quarters; her mistress soon follows, and both women burst out laughing at their own discomfiture.

Shortly before the establishment of the Empire, Mademoiselle had to complain of the inattention of her great lover who, during one long fortnight, did not summon her to his Palace. Georgina thought that the liaison was drawing to its inevitable end, and on visiting the theatre on the same occasion as Bonaparte, when she occupied the box opposite his, affected not to be aware of his presence. Murat, acting by instruction, we may imagine, paid her a visit during the last act, and taking advantage of her offer of a seat in her carriage, advised the actress, on the homeward journey, to call upon the First Consul as he had asked her to do. Georgina visits her patron, accordingly, and learns from his lips that he cannot see her for some time, but that he will always look after her interests. Talma assured her, on the day after this visit, that the Consul was to change his exalted rank for a still loftier one, and that it was reasonable policy on the part of the Emperor-elect to use circumspection; besides, he added, Bonaparte was not the man to allow

his love affairs to spoil his real rôle in the world.

A few months afterwards Georgina, with her somewhat commonplace family, was an eye-witness of the Imperial procession to Notre Dame, 2nd December 1804. *Cinna* was to be staged by Imperial command, within ten days of the Coronation; Georgina played her usual part of Æmilia, and with great success. Not till five weeks had passed, however, was the actress to meet the Emperor, who received her with the same unaffected kindliness as in the old Consular days. Poor Georgina, unused to courts and with much of the naïveté of the bourgeoisie in her conceptions of what was proper form, attempted a courtly rôle which did not please the master.

"Stilted manners do not suit you, Georgina," said the simple soldier. "Be as you used to be—unaffected and frank."

For all his studied plainness, the actress found, nevertheless, that the Emperor had displaced the Citoyen Consul, that the new style of drama seemed to her, she says, to be acted on a higher and more imposing plane, and Georgina quickly realised that she could never find happiness in such surroundings. Madame Duchâtel, a lady-of-honour, in any case, soon attracted the Emperor's notice and Mademoiselle George only met her old lover at very rare intervals thereafter. Her relations with Napoleon lasted about two years in all, and it is fairly well established that the Corsican divided the favours of the actress

with a considerable number of *flâneurs* of note in Paris. In all probability this fact revealed itself to the First Consul only after a lengthy acquaintance with Georgina, and accounted for the sudden enough rupture of the alliance.

Frenchmen as a rule are most hypercritical of each other in regard to what they call *bonnes fortunes*, and Voltaire has told us that they do not easily forgive any man his success among womankind. Accordingly, we may well believe that the young Conqueror of Italy soon became an object of the sarcasms of ordinary men, and more particularly on account of the fact that in the Consular period he was unusually thin and weakly-looking, while his height—actually five feet six and three-quarter inches, in English measurement, or about five feet three inches according to French standards—was poor among the existing race of Frenchmen, who were then of lofty stature, like their Gallic ancestors, and whose subsequent decrease in stature was due, in a large part, to the ravages caused by the Imperial wars among the manhood of France. In a capital which in those days—if we are to trust the writers—had raised cuckoldry to the proportions of a social art, we may be certain that the mistress of so great a man could not escape the aggressive attentions of men whose existence depended so largely on new sensations. It was among this peculiar race of beings that Napoleon earned the reputation of being a *niais*—where women were concerned.

The Emperor, it would seem, objected in Mademoiselle George to two characteristics which, he very correctly said, showed that she came of a "*race grossière*," or common race—namely, her large hands and feet, and only overlooked these defects in consideration of other first-class qualifications which she possessed for the rôle of *hetaira*. During their association the soldier gave his mistress many thousands of pounds, and even several years after the rupture, sent her a present of £400 on his name-day. The actress admits that he always paid her himself, sparing her the ordeal of calling on his banker, a fact which showed that Bonaparte possessed better taste in such matters than the late Marquis of Steyne. Although, in 1808, Georgina deserted Paris for Moscow, under circumstances which she recounts herself, Napoleon had her reinstated at the Comédie Française in 1813, and even had her paid the salary she had forfeited over a period of five years.

During the Hundred Days, Georgina wrote to her old lover, offering to hand over to him certain letters which incriminated Fouché, and Napoleon sent a confidential man to fetch them, asking him on his return if the actress had complained about the state of her affairs. Georgina had not mentioned that she was in poor circumstances. Nevertheless the Emperor sent her an order for £800 on his privy purse. To the very end the actress spoke well of the Corsican, but not as a woman talks of an old and favoured lover; rather

MADEMOISELLE GEORGE
After an engraving

as a favourite official might speak of a departed sovereign. She admitted that Napoleon saw in herself only the beautiful animal, and forgot her once she passed from his society. On her own side, she saw nothing in the Corsican but the demi-god, and the incarnate spirit of triumph; least of all, the lover or the lovable. An English writer, treating of her relations with and her regard for Napoleon, expresses himself as follows:—

"Up to the last George could never speak of Napoleon without a break in her voice—a thrill of genuine emotion. It was not her lover she recalled, but the great Emperor—*l'homme immense*, as she called him, with real art. She spoke of him with timid reverence, and seemed to have forgotten that he had once thought her beautiful, and had told her so. This reticence was not the tardy modesty of old age, for she spoke freely of her other lovers—what a crowd of celebrities! Talleyrand, Murat, Ouvrard, Lucien Bonaparte, King Jerôme, the Emperor Alexander I., Prince Sapieha, Count Benckendorff, Prince Demidoff, Coster de Saint-Victor, Jules Janin, Alexandre Dumas, Tom Harel, and countless others. It was rather that she saw in him, not the part he had played to her, but the part he had played to France; like those nymphs of old who, honoured by the embraces of a god, were so dazzled by the blinding light of his glory that they never even beheld his face."

George has earned the reputation of having once given a favoured lover a rendezvous which

proved the costliest on record. Here are the facts as retailed by one of the chroniclers :

"Among the many celebrities on whom her charms made an impression was Ouvrard, the great Imperial financier and army contractor. Already under the Directory, Ouvrard's fêtes at Le Raincy and then at Rueil, were the talk of Paris. Twice a week the *corps de ballet* of the Opera were entertained ; an enormous white marble bath served for their ablutions, and each lady left with a present of fifty louis. George once cost him—as he himself related—£84,000 for a single visit. Ouvrard had invited her to sup at Rueil, but that very same evening Bonaparte had given her a rendezvous at Saint-Cloud, and she informed the financier that she would have to postpone her visit. Ouvrard was furious, and vowed he would not yield to a shrimp like Bonaparte, whom he had known as a poor Captain of Artillery, and who had been only too happy to be invited to his house in the early days of the Directory. So he insisted upon George coming to Rueil, adding as a postscript that she would 'find £4000 in the folds of her napkin' at supper. She could not refuse this. The Consul would have to wait. So, pleading a sudden indisposition she was rapidly borne to Rueil in one of Ouvrard's carriages. The Emperor had his spies and heard of it. Ouvrard received a summons to appear forthwith at the Tuileries. Here he was promptly ushered into the Chief's presence.

"'Monsieur, how much did you make out of

your contract for the army at the beginning of the year ?' Bonaparte demanded.

"'The financier, knowing it was useless to lie, replied : '£160,000, Sire.'

"'Then, sir, you made too much; you will immediately pay £80,000 back into the Treasury. *Bonjour*, Monsieur !'"

CHAPTER VI

NAPOLEON AND WEIMAR

The Cult of Napoleon—Goethe on the Corsican—The Congress of Erfurt—Honouring the Sage—Lannes, Maret and Goethe—Presentation to the Emperor—Ecce Homo!—The Emperor and Werther—Politics and Fate—Napoleon's Manœuvre—Müller on the Interview—Talleyrand's Version of the Meeting—Preparations for Erfurt—An Imperial Opinion upon Athalie—Goethe and Dedication—Talleyrand on Napoleon's Learning—Johann von Müller—The Emperor on Christianity—Tragedy, the School of Kings—Wieland is presented—Les genres tranchés—History and Romance—Wieland at the Palace—Tacitus and the Annals—Napoleon's Opinion—Wieland's Eloquence—The Great Painter of Antiquity—Livy and Tacitus—The World's Happiest Age?

THOSE who hold that the cult of Napoleon is a certain indication of a shallow mind—and their number grows—must find themselves in some difficulty when they attempt to provide us with an apology for Goethe's ecstatic worship of the world's foremost exponent of the strenuous life.

"Napoleon," said the German, "always lived in the ideal and nevertheless was not conscious of the fact; he denied the ideal and refused to admit its reality, while all the time he sought with ardour to realise it. His reason, so lucid and incorruptible, could not, however, perpetually support the essential contradiction involved, and his words are often of the highest import, as for example, when he describes an idea as a child of Reason; or when he declares that each idea gives birth to another and that the influence of a fruitful idea can never die. Therefore, he declares, he himself must live, since he has given a new impulse and a new direction to the march of human progress."

When the entire Continent was organising itself for the destruction of the mighty disturber of the peace of Europe, Goethe alone, of all the great literary spirits of Germany, openly expressed his grief that France, which he looked upon as his "second Fatherland," was about to be invaded by the gathering coalitions, and privately made no pretence at disguising his opinion that with the passing of Napoleon must also perish the active spirit of Liberty for some generations to come.

His faithful house-friends, Müller, the Chancellor, and Eckermann, the author, have also chronicled on many a page his veneration for the man of action. Eckermann on one occasion lamented that he had never seen Napoleon in person, and Goethe replied by telling the Schriftsteller that he had indeed missed a sight worth seeing.

"Did he look like something?" inquires the simple Eckermann, entirely in the style of the conversationists of Ollendorf's *German Grammar.*

"He *was* something," replies Goethe pontifically, "and looked what he was."

"Napoleon was the man!" declares the German Sage another day. *Das war ein Kerl*—always enlightened, always clear and decided and endowed at every hour with sufficient energy to carry into effect whatever he considered advantageous and necessary. His life was the stride of a demi-god from battle to battle and from victory to victory. It might well be said of him that he was found in a state of continual enlightenment. On this account his destiny was more brilliant than any the world had seen before him, or perhaps will ever see after him."

At this point in the conversation, Eckermann chronicles, Goethe poured him out a glass of wine, inviting him to help himself at the table; encouraged by which hospitality he fires off the following typical German sentiment at the poet:

"Still it appears to me that Napoleon was especially in that state of continued enlightenment when he was young, and his powers were

yet on the increase—when, indeed, we see at his side divine protection and a constant fortune. In later years, on the contrary, this enlightenment appears to have forsaken him, as well as his fortune and his good star."

"*Que voulez-vous?*" returns Goethe, bursting into exotic French, "I did not write my Love-songs or my Werther a second time," and goes on ponderously to explain in effect to the voracious Eckermann that Napoleon was as great as he was simply because he was not less great than he might have been. And Eckermann swallows this pearl of wisdom, but wisely goes on cutting *Brotschnitten*, like Werther's lady, and does not contradict.

"Napoleon," Goethe declares on another occasion, "had studied my Werther as a criminal judge studies his documents and in this spirit he discussed it with me"—a view which is hardly supported by extant records of the famous conversation which took place on 2nd October 1808 at Erfurt, whither, it will be remembered, Napoleon summoned a Congress of celebrities of all sorts, less with the object of really dealing with the political situation, we may suppose, than with the deliberate intention of summarising for posterity, in one impressive pageant, the significance of his mighty march across the field of human action.

Among the crowd of royal and princely personages whose presence at Erfurt was chronicled by the *Moniteur*, especial attention was given to the

name of Monsieur de Goethe, who is paragraphed more generously than many a minor sovereign.

"The Court of Weimar has brought us the celebrated Goethe," writes the Paris paper's special correspondent. "A minister of the Duke of Weimar, this author is still young, although his reputation is of ancient date. He is an assiduous attendant at the theatre, where he has had an opportunity of seeing our actors in *Andromache*, *Britannicus* and *Zaïre*."

Marshal Lannes had stayed at Goethe's house in 1806 and had conceived a great admiration for the German. On the latter's arrival at Erfurt, the famous soldier had hastened to pay his respects, and they subsequently saw much of each other. Goethe also made the acquaintance of the Minister Maret, on whom the German poet produced so profound an impression that he spoke of it to Napoleon. Goethe was accordingly summoned to the presence of the Emperor and made his appearance at the Imperial residence where, in an ante-chamber, he was presented to both Savary and Talleyrand. After some delay, the poet entered the presence. Napoleon was at breakfast, Talleyrand standing at his right and Daru to the left.

"The Emperor makes me a sign to approach, and I advance to within a suitable distance," the poet tells us, "when Napoleon, having looked at me fixedly for a few moments, says, 'You are a man,'—whereupon I bow."

Goethe, it is certain, was very proud of this

peeuliar expression of Napoleon's praise. A certain Graf von Reinhardt wrote to him in November of the same year, saying that people were discussing the phrase used by the Emperor, adding: "I can well believe Napoleon capable of feeling and speaking as he did." Goethe replies to this letter in December, eommenting on the Emperor's "wunderbares Wort," whieh he faeetiously compares with the world-historic *Ecce Homo!*—adding that he is pleased with the Conqueror's good opinion of him.

Having inquired as to his age and assured him that he carried his sixty years well, Napoleon turns the eonversation to the subject of Werther, and cites a certain passage, asking the poet why he had worked out an idea which was opposed to truth and nature. After listening to a lengthy disquisition as to this detail, Goethe admits that the Emperor is perfeetly right and that the passage is ineonsistent with truth. Napoleon declares that the ehief fault of the Freneh Theatre is that it attaehes no value to the necessity of keeping elose to nature and truth. Voltaire's *Mahomet* he deelares to bc "a bad pieee," beeause truth is sacrificed to the spectaeular and to artifiee, after whieh the Emperor goes into the minutest details, showing how a world-eonqueror ean only be represented faithfully as long as his rôle is played on a lofty and grandiose plane. In expatiating on this idea, he expressed his disapproval of all dramatic work in whieh Fate plays a capital rôle:

"Sueh works," he deelared, "belong to the

obscure ages. And besides—what is meant by Fate? Politics is Fate—*la politique est la fatalité*."

Here Napoleon rose from the table and approached the poet.

"By a sort of *manœuvre*," says Goethe, with a typically German lack of humour, "Napoleon separated me from the others and, turning his back on the company, began to question me on matters of personal interest to myself."

And so the great soldier, who had shown the quality of his manœuvres at the little affairs of Austerlitz and Jena, having given the man of Letters a kind of private show of his art, proceeds after his fashion to inquire if Goethe is married and what are his exact relations with the Grand-Ducal house of Weimar.

Goethe, it may be observed, would never allow himself to be drawn into indicating the particular passage in *Werther* to which the Corsican had taken exception, as stated above, and to authorities who questioned him on the subject he was wont to return the tactful enough suggestion that as literary men, they were surely equal to the task of locating it. The Chancellor Müller claimed, however, to be in a position to solve a problem which, in Germany at least, has proved itself fruitful of endless and, indeed, purposeless discussion. Napoleon, according to Müller, assured Goethe that he had read *Werther* seven times, and always with renewed pleasure. In order to confirm his words, he quoted abundantly and finished by blaming the poet for having made disappointed

ambition, equally with his hopeless love for Charlotte, the motive which drove Werther to suicide.

"That," says the Emperor, "is not true to nature, and you have weakened for the reader the idea which he had formed of Werther's great love for Charlotte."

There is no finality about this solution given by the Chancellor, it may be said.

Talleyrand, in his *Memoirs*, gives another version of the interview at Erfurt, relating how Napoleon assured the officials that it was his intention to astonish Germany with his Imperial magnificence. And while discussing his projected journey to Erfurt, he summoned M. Dazincourt, then director of his Imperial theatre, when the following dialogue took place :—

"I want the Comédie Française to come to Erfurt with me," says the Emperor.

"For comedies or tragedies?" inquires Dazincourt winningly.

"For tragedies, of course," replies Napoleon testily. "Our comedies would be no good in Germany, where the French genius is not understood."

"Of course your Majesty will want everything on a very grand scale?" suggests the director. "We could, for instance, give *Athalie*, Sire!"

"A fig for your *Athalie*!" cries Napoleon irritably. "You certainly, Dazincourt, do not understand a man like myself. Do you think I am going to Erfurt to suggest the rôle of a

Joash to these Germans? *Athalie!* What a horrible idea! But enough—tell your best tragic actors to prepare for a journey to Erfurt. *Athalie*, indeed! How stupid these old fogies are!" he adds, as Dazincourt bows himself out. "But it is really my own fault—I should not consult anyone. If he had even said *Cinna*, which is a truly good piece!" And then he turns to Monsieur de Rémusat, who is present, saying:

"I was never much good at recitation; but tell me, Rémusat, does not the following passage occur in *Cinna*?

> "'Tous ces crimes d'Etat qu'on fait pour la couronne
> Le ciel nous en absout, alors qu'il nous la donne?'

How do the next lines go? Get a Corneille, Rémusat."

"*Inutile, Sire*," replies Rémusat; "I remember them," and goes on, French-fashion, to declaim:

> "Et dans le rang sacré où sa faveur l'a mis,
> Le passé devient juste et l'avenir permis.
> Qui peut y parvenir, ne peut être coupable;
> Quoi qu'il ait fait, ou fasse, il est inviolable."

"Splendid!" cries the Emperor, with enthusiasm; "more particularly for those hard-headed Germans, who never change their ideas, and who still blether about the death of the Duc d'Enghien: we must broaden their moral views, and the sentiments of Corneille are the proper sentiments for men with melancholy ideas, like the Germans. We must have *Cinna* for the first

day, and you, Rémusat, can look up tragedies for the other days. Of course, you will let me know before deciding on anything."

According to Talleyrand, in his account of Goethe's interview, there is no mention of the phrase "*vous êtes un homme!*"; and, by the same authority, Goethe does not allow Napoleon to overlook the claims to high literary rank of Lessing, Schiller, Wieland. The Emperor expresses a wish to meet the last-named, and advises the poet to study the plays which are being acted. Goethe tactfully evades the suggestion that he is the man to chronicle and describe for posterity the Congress of Erfurt, as the Corsican suggests, and declines to dedicate anything to the Emperor of Russia on the ground that when he first decided to devote himself to Letters, he also took the resolution never to dedicate a work to anyone, so as not to have to regret it, as he explained.

"The great writers of the age of Louis XIV. were not like that," objects the Emperor rather coldly.

"True," replies Goethe, "but it is not so very certain that they never regretted their dedications." Which reply settles the matter.

On Napoleon's making an inquiry about Kotzebue, the poet appeals for mercy for that unfortunate pamphleteer and patriot. The Emperor assures his visitor that he has no sympathy with men like Kotzebue. Goethe seeks to move him.

"Adieu, Monsieur Goet'!" says the Corsican curtly, and draws the interview to a close.

The selection of the tragedies presented at Erfurt had, says Talleyrand, been made with great care and much art. Each historical subject was made to point a political moral that applied to those spacious days. Thus, in *Mithridates*, the hatred of that Prince for Rome suggested Napoleon's hatred of Britain. The ideas of immortality, of greatness, of destiny, which run through *Iphigenia*, served only to emphasise the characteristics of the central figure of the Congress. In Voltaire's *Mahomet*, especial instruction had been given for the delivery of lines like the following:—

"Qui l'a fait roi? Qui l'a couronné? La Victoire!"

and:

"Au nom de conquérant et de triomphateur,
Il veut joindre le nom de pacificateur."

Talleyrand, who was a first-class hater, must be held suspect in what he says of coevals. There is so remarkable a coincidence, however, between his way of looking at Napoleon and that of de Bourrienne—a fidelity of detail in all matters which present the picture of the upstart, that we cannot refuse to look at what he has to say of Napoleon's pretensions to play the rôle of *bel esprit*. The Emperor, says the Prince, in effect, used to devote considerable time to "working up" recondite, or at least learned, conversational

matter with which he surprised his company, when, the occasion being astutely chosen, he would spring it, impromptu-fashion, on some unprepared unfortunate. He never had before him the fear of a positive contradiction, since his exalted position always enabled him to choose the means of interrupting a conscientious objector to his opinions, and in foreign countries, especially, it was his habit to discuss matters which possessed a bearing and suggestion altogether outside the intellectual range of a military man.

Indeed, adds Talleyrand, the presence of a Montesquieu or a Voltaire would have had no terrors for Napoleon, whose self-assurance arose perhaps from vanity, perhaps from the splendour of his career. At Berlin in 1807, for instance, the Prince tells us how the victor of Friedland had addressed one of those intellectual omnivores whom Germany so frequently produces. His name was Johann von Müller, and among his productions were a few trifles like a comprehensive *Bellum Cimbricum* and a General History of the World, in twenty-four tomes. Napoleon requested him off-hand to fix the principal epochs of human thought and action, and, impatient of the historian's pause for consideration, set about doing so himself. Says Talleyrand :

" I can still see the astonished face of Professor Müller, as Napoleon went on to show how the rapid propagation and development of Christianity had caused a reaction of Greek ideals against those of Rome ; how cleverly Greece had adapted

herself to an intellectual rôle once her national political grandeur had passed—*conquête qu'elle avait effectuée en saisissant ce germe bienfaiteur qui a eu tant d'influence sur l'humanité entière*"—meaning, of course, the triumph of Christianity over Pagan culture.

"Napoleon must have learned this last phrase by heart," adds the sceptical Talleyrand, "for I heard him repeat it in exactly the same words to M. de Fontanes and also to M. Suard."

"Philosophers," concluded Napoleon to Johann Müller, "exhaust themselves in building up systems; but they shall look in vain for a better philosophy than that of Christianity which has reconciled man with himself and his fellows and guaranteed order in all the world." A view which few men of good intent would be found to quarrel with, if only Christianity were what Christianity was meant to be.

Chancellor von Müller—no relative of the late-mentioned—a kind of president of the High Court of Justice at Weimar, and a close friend and confidant of Goethe, adds a few more details concerning this historic interview.

"Tragedy," said the Emperor, "is the school of kings and nations; it is in some respects more important than history and by far the highest achievement of the poet. You, Monsieur Goet', ought to write a *Death of Cæsar*, but in a more grandiose and elevated style than that of Voltaire. Indeed, such a work might well become the central task of your life. In such a tragedy

you would have to show the world how Cæsar could have achieved the happiness of mankind if he had only been given the time to execute his mighty conceptions. Come to Paris, Monsieur Goet'; I want you to come, and there you will not fail to see a vaster vision for your powers of observation, besides finding limitless treasure to draw upon for your poetical inspirations."

And when the Sage had bowed himself out, the Emperor, Müller tells us, turned to Berthier and Daru with the words: "That is a man!" Goethe himself maintained a profound silence on all the incidents of the interview, and the Chancellor remained in doubt whether this was owing to his natural reserve or whether it was inspired by a feeling of delicacy and propriety, born of his perfect knowledge of the hypercritical society amidst which he lived. The invitation which Napoleon had given him to visit Paris engaged Goethe's consideration for a long time, and (says the Chancellor) he asked many questions about the customs of Paris, about the arrangements to be made, and only abandoned the idea on reflecting that so long and tedious a journey might prove too trying for his advanced age.

"It was in the very last years of his life," concludes the Chancellor, "that Goethe gave me the details of his interview with Napoleon, and it was not till a few days before his death that I was able to induce him to give me permission to amplify the laconic fragments of his own Annals."

The Imperial cortège in due course moved on to Weimar, where Müller was able to present Wieland to the Conqueror. This luminary occupied in those days in Germany very much the same position that Voltaire had occupied in France of his age, and, indeed, on his presentation to the Emperor, Napoleon assured him that he was known in Paris as the Voltaire of Germany.

"Which of your writings do you like best?" was the first question.

"Sire," replied the simple scholar, "I attach no great value to any of my productions. I wrote according to my heart."

"But," persisted Napoleon, "there must be one particular work to which you give preference over the rest."

Wieland named his *Agathon* and *Oberon*, whereupon Napoleon went on to make his famous remark about *genres tranchés*—a correct rendering of which phrase we prefer to leave to the literary connoisseurs. The great soldier objected, it seems, to Shakespeare's method, which "mixed tragedy with comedy, the impressive with the burlesque," and, turning to both Wieland and Goethe, said:

"I am surprised that acute minds like yours do not cultivate a style *tranché*, or exclusive. Why, in your *Agathon*, Monsieur Wieland, do you indulge in that equivocal tendency to mix romance with history, and history with romance, since all work of this kind tends to cause confusion in the reader's mind? I am aware," admits the Emperor graciously, "that I am fighting against

great odds—all the more so because my remarks apply to Monsieur Goet' as well as to yourself."

"Your Majesty may allow us to remark," replies Wieland, "that there are very few French tragedies that are not a mixture of history and romance. As regards my own work, I sought to instruct and so I needed the authority of history; accordingly, I sweetened the pill of prolix learning by mixing stern reality with the imaginative and the pleasing. Men's ideals are sometimes better than their actions, and romances which describe good men often describe them as better than they really are, I think. Compare, Sire, the *Siècle de Louis XIV.* with *Télémaque*, in which you will find the best lessons both for the governors and the governed."

"I find," rejoins Napoleon, "that those who represent righteous men in fiction always end by proving that righteousness is only a chimæra. History indeed has suffered much in this respect from historians themselves."

The conversation is interrupted here by M. de Nansouty, who announces the arrival of the courier from Paris.

Wieland himself relates how on the occasion of a great gala reception at the Grand-Ducal palace, which he had not attended, Napoleon had a carriage especially sent for him, and the man of Letters, without delaying to change his ordinary attire, at once proceeded to the Palace. Here he arrived about eleven o'clock and was immediately taken to the presence of the Emperor, who, in

consideration of the great author's seventy-five years, good-naturedly overlooked his skull-cap and slippers. For over an hour, Napoleon, in the presence of a motley group of celebrities, discussed the ancient classics with the old scholar, paying particular attention to Tacitus, and in connection with this academic rencontre, it is noteworthy that Talleyrand affects to believe that the Emperor had burned much midnight oil in preparing his case against Wieland and the Roman. Tacitus, it may be remarked, is said by properly accredited authorities to be the first of the psychologists of history and a profound analyst of ulterior motives in political action. Accordingly, he found but little honour with the Corsican whose prejudice favoured the unquestioning spirit among the critics.

"Tacitus," he said, "has taught me nothing. Can you point out a greater or a more unjust detractor of humanity? In the simplest actions he finds criminal motives. All his emperors are monsters of iniquity inspired by different varieties of evil genius, and they were not at all bad judges who declared that the *Annals* are not so much a history of Rome as an abstract of its criminal records. Everywhere one is confronted with accusers and accused—men who commit suicide in the bathroom to escape punishment. Tacitus is always decrying the informers (*delatores*), yet where is a greater scandalmonger than himself? And the style—one long night of obscurity! I am no great Latinist myself, but the obscurity

of Tacitus is quite obvious to me in the ten or twelve Italian or French translations which I have read, and I have come to the conclusion that this lack of clearness in his style arose from sheer inability to see things as they really were. I have heard him praised because he has inspired tyrants with fear. He has inspired kings, in my view, with the fear of their subjects, and that is a bad thing for a nation. *N'ai-je pas raison, Monsieur Wieland?* But really I am monopolising you—we have not come here to talk about Tacitus." And, casting a glance at the moving scene before him, he calls attention to the Emperor Alexander:

"See how well he dances," Napoleon observes, and takes a pinch of snuff.

"I do not know why we are here, Sire," replies the simple Wieland, "but I do know that your Majesty makes me at this moment the happiest man alive."

"Well, then, answer me," says Napoleon kindly.

"Sire," returns the writer, "from the way in which your Majesty talks, I am led to forget that you are twice a sovereign, and only see in you the man of Letters. I know that you do not disdain the title, for I have not forgotten your pride in being a Member of the *Institut*. I will, therefore, answer the man of Letters, and although I felt at Erfurt that I defended myself but feebly against your criticisms, I hope to make a better defence of Tacitus.

"Of this historian," Wieland continued, "I

agree that his chief aim is to punish tyrants; but if he denounces them, he does not denounce them to slavish men, who would revolt only to change tyrants. Tacitus denounces tyrants to the justice of history and to the human race, for it is said by philosophers that the human race must be tried by suffering until its reason acquires the force which its passions have up till then held."

"Yet where is this force of reason?" asks Napoleon. "I look for it on all sides and see it nowhere."

"Sire," replies Wieland, "it is not so long since Tacitus has come into fashion, and that in itself indicates a marked advance of the human mind; for during centuries, Academies would not read him, any more than Courts, and the slaves of taste were as much afraid of him as the advocates of despotism. It is only since Racine called him *the great painter of antiquity* that your universities and ours have felt disposed to inquire into the possibility of his being really so. Your Majesty declares that in reading Tacitus, you find denunciation, assassination, robbery on all hands. But, Sire, that is exactly what the Roman Empire was when governed by the monsters whom Tacitus so severely flayed. The genius of Livy followed the Legions of the Roman Republic throughout the world; that of Tacitus concentrated itself on the law reports (*greffe*), and it was here that the real history of the Empire was to be found. It is indeed, in these alone that we can read the history of nations of those

unhappy ages, when princes and their subjects, opposed to one another in principles and ideals, lived in terror of each other. In such times there is little else to chronicle but the daily records of the criminal courts—when death at the hands of the public executioner comes to be regarded almost as the natural way of leaving life.

"Sire, Suetonius and Dion Cassius have chronicled a far greater number of crimes than Tacitus ever chronicled, but they chronicle them in a style which is wholly devoid of energy, whereas nothing is more terrible than the stylus of Tacitus whose genius inclines before the spirit of justice alone. As soon, indeed, as he perceives the presence of Good—even in the reign of that monster Tiberius—he swiftly seizes upon it and gives to it the salience which he gives to everything he touches. He can even praise a fool like Claudius, where praise is really due, and this august attribute of justice, Tacitus extends with unerring impartiality to all conditions—to the Republic as to the Empire, to subjects as well as to their princes. By the quality of his genius, one would think him capable of attaching himself to the Republic, and his opinions about Brutus, Cassius, Codrus would seem to confirm this view. Yet, when he speaks of the Emperors who succeeded in reconciling what was thought to be irreconcilable—namely, Empire and Liberty—we can feel that this system of governance appeals to him as the fairest discovery of history."

Here a certain movement in the large group

of courtiers signifies, we may suppose, not so much admiration at Wieland's probably prepared eloquence as a desire to emphasise the obviously implied compliment to Napoleon—truly an undeserved compliment, if ever was.

"Sire," the Sage continues, "if it is true to say of Tacitus that tyrants are punished, once he has portrayed them, how much more truthful is it to say that righteous princes are rewarded once he has traced their picture for posterity!"

"I fight against odds, Monsieur Wieland," admits the Emperor darkly. "You sacrifice no advantages, I see, and you must have known that I was no admirer of Tacitus. Do you, by the way, correspond with Monsieur Johann de Müller whom I met last year in Berlin?" Napoleon was much too astute, we can fancy, not to have seen that all Wieland's eloquence had been prepared against contingencies.

"Yes, Sire," replies the German very candidly.

"Ah, then, confess," laughs Napoleon, "that he has written to you on the subject of Tacitus."

"It is true," admits honest old Wieland, "it is indeed through him I learned that your Majesty liked to discuss Tacitus, and also that you did not admire him."

"I will not admit yet that I am beaten," declares Napoleon; "a thing I never admit very easily. I return to-morrow to Erfurt, and we shall resume our discussion about Tacitus. I have a sufficient stock of ammunition in my arsenal to show that for all his investigation of the motives

of great men, he did not sufficiently develop the causes and the intimate springs of important events. He did not study deeply enough the mystery of facts and ideas, and failed so to adjust them in the chain of events as to enable posterity to judge correctly and impartially.

"History, as I understand it," Napoleon goes on, "must be able to seize upon individuals and nations and present them as they were in their own day. The historian should take into account the external circumstances which must necessarily have exercised a great influence on their actions, and see clearly the limits of their influence. The Roman Emperors were by no means so bad as Tacitus has described them. I much prefer Montesquieu to the Roman; the Frenchman is more just and his judgments nearer to truth."

It was then nearly midnight and Wieland began to feel the strain of expressing himself in a language which he was not accustomed to speak. "I took the liberty," he says, "of asking the Emperor if I might retire."

"*Allez*," replied Napoleon graciously; "*bonne nuit!*"

The Emperor, on another occasion, asked Wieland which age he considered to be the happiest for mankind—a question he had also put to the historian Müller, at Berlin, in 1806, when the Prussian gave his verdict in favour of the ages of the Antonines. In his turn, old Wieland replied, with admirable wisdom:

"A decisive answer is not possible to such a

question. The Greeks, judged by their general culture and by the political freedom which they enjoyed as citizens, had their ages of great prosperity. Rome counted among her princes more than one who might be called the good angel of humanity. Other nations, too, can boast of having had great and wise governors. Yet it seems to me that the general history of the world travels ever in one great circle, in which good and evil, virtue and vice succeed each other continually. It is the duty of the philosopher to bring out all the good there is in each age, so as to make the bad supportable."

CHAPTER VII

THE IMPERIAL ART-PATRON

A Specious Sentiment—Art, Merit, and the Napoleonic Cult—The Corsican's Native Materialism—A Political Monument—Artists a "Waspish Lot"—Art to Order—Feeding the Fraternity—Economy in Public Architecture—A Napoleonic Art—The Emperor's Dislike of Architects—Some Prices paid to Famous Artists—The Corsican a Connoisseur without Pretensions—Insistence on the Napoleonic Legend—How to hurt Englishmen—The Imperial Réclame—Napoleon's Art Collection at La Malmaison—A List of Pictures

NAPOLEON once declared to Decrès that he did not want his reign to pass and leave a single man of merit unrecognised—a specious sentiment the sincerity of which becomes accurately measurable when we study the case of Madame de Stael, and consider his mode of distinguishing Monsieur de Chateaubriand. Merit which did not contribute to the Napoleonic legend was, in the eyes of the Corsican, no merit at all, and the established mediocrity of all those who formed part of the circle of his art patronage, whether as writers or poets or painters, may be put down, *sans phrase*, to the fact that artistic genius is a quality which, on the highest planes, can achieve its particular results only when it remains independent of, and even uninspired by, objective sources. Certainly the inspirations of a fighting soldier are not calculated to assist its progress in any surroundings, or in any age—least of all such inspirations as came from Napoleon, whose artisticity was that of the geometrician or the mathematical expert, wholly uncoloured by sentiment, entirely lacking in the warmth of a higher or poetic vision, and limited altogether to the actualities of current circumstance. Accordingly, when he decided that the Art of the first Imperial age of France should bear an Imperial cachet, he limited its expression not only as an artistic force, but also as one which, had it been left to work out its original genius, must have contributed by its own richer results to the greater glory of his reign.

Despotism, it has been said, fears neither mathematicians nor artists, and while anxious for the advancement of all matters æsthetic, the Corsican gave his patronage to the Fine Arts for much the reason that inspires the great new-rich art-collectors of to-day—namely, self-glorification, not at all praiseworthy, and certainly not always artistic. We could cite, if necessary, many proofs here in point: he hastened on the building of the Louvre, for example, because, as Bausset (quoting the Emperor himself) says, it was necessary, in view of his relatively ambiguous position among the sovereigns of Europe, to possess a grander palace than other kings. When Vignon proposed his Temple of Glory, Napoleon agreed on the condition that the edifice should be completed within four years, because, as he said:

"This monument is to some extent a *political* monument, and must therefore be finished quickly, so as to count for something in the national conditions of the day."

No American raiser of sky-scrapers ever carried business-like expediency to a higher point than this, we think. And, as will be seen in due course, if he associated with artists and treated them with an amiability which one divines to be really foreign to his nature, it was certainly not for any regard for a class of beings who are to a great extent a race apart, and as such could win no sympathy from Napoleon's regimental mind with its *plans arrêtés* and its essentially fixed

notions. In regard to the artistic brotherhood, indeed, we can well conceive of Napoleon describing them in the phrase attributed to Lord Melbourne—"a waspish lot." All his affected intimacies with writers, painters, sculptors and musicians were calculated solely to make them contribute to the magnificence of his legend. Only this and nothing more.

"The Emperor," says a writer of that time, "is most anxious to unite to the glory of a great sovereign, the reputation of an enlightened protector of the Arts, which distinguished Pericles, Augustus and Louis XIV., and the *mot d'ordre* to the officials of the world of Art is to work towards this end."

Talented artists were to be won over to official views about art matters by good salaries, as well as by the prospect of being permanently employed. At one time he considered triumphal arches as so many extravagances; after 1806, however, when his mania for immortality became an enduring obsession, he decided to erect four such monuments, with the object, as he himself declared in his own cynical fashion, of *feeding* Sculpture for at least twenty years to come. And in a public manifesto, the essentially unartistic Modernist and Philistine speaks when he declares that in view of the valuable prizes which are being offered to art workers, France has a *right* to expect that her artists shall produce masterpieces! Contemporaries do not fail to note the real parsimony which marks his treatment of painters and

sculptors, and a letter of his, addressed to the Minister of the Interior, recommends that functionary to see to it that only the most economical styles are to be encouraged. To the same official he writes the following order in March, 1808 :—

"I should like to have a bridge constructed leading to the Invalides. One like the Pont des Arts would come to about £30,000 and must soon repay its cost. Once completed, its shares could be sold and the money devoted to other civic improvements."

Historical writers have not omitted to note that, wherever possible, he razed such monuments and edifices as were likely to recall the glories of previous French sovereigns, and to this tendency on his part may be attributed the destruction of Marly, of Chantilly, of the Abbey of Saint Martin of Tours, of Cluny, the disappearance of all of which historical grandeurs dates from the Consulate. Many of his intimates—if such a being ever possessed an intimate—declared that he not only was incapable of appreciating Architecture, but that his antipathy extended even to the greatest exponents of that art, his expressed opinion being that they were on all counts inferior to engineers. To those who advocated the construction of spectacular edifices, and cited the vast constructions of Louis XIV., as contributions to the prestige of that monarch, Napoleon more than once replied, with much cogency, that the renown of a king lay not in monuments which the servility of one age readily raised to his glory, and which

the *insouciance* of another demolished with equal readiness. One reason for his dislike of architects was said to be the extravagance they showed in estimates submitted for projected constructions; in which estimate their sense of necessary expenditure came into violent conflict with that of the Imperial economist—a trait which suggests that the Corsican himself had few illusions that his reign was not to be a lengthy one; a reflection, too, which becomes all the more insistent when we consider the fact that the Luxembourg's decorations were all executed in *simili*, as the artists put it, meaning that the walls and the pillars were painted to resemble marble, the candelabra to look like bronze, and so on.

Heavily remunerated artists of the present day would certainly not think the following payments extravagant, considering the high status of the painters: For his picture of the Jaffa plague victims, Gros received 625 guineas; Vernet, for his battle of Austerlitz, £800; David, for his Coronation and The Oath canvases, £4800. Imperial portraits had a regulation rate of remuneration—namely, £240—while the "stock" portrait of the Emperor, to be placed in town halls and prefectures, cost just £120. Painters who executed miniatures of the sovereign received £20 to £24. Full-sized pictures of marshals and high officials went at £160. David's portrait of Pius VII. brought in £400 for the original and £480 for two copies by himself. For his battle of Quiberon, Hennequin received £160, in 1804, and artists

who executed pictures of the Imperial horses received £5, 5s. for each effort, while Vernet as a special favour got £10. Sculptors received £600 for a large work, and full-length statues cost £400, the price of busts being £116.

It is only fair to the memory of the Corsican to say that in matters of Art he never posed as a connoisseur, and if the charge of mediocrity hangs over the art productions of his age, it has to be remembered that in the majority of commissions, the artists and the subjects were the choice of ministers who, like true business men, distributed their patronage usually in consideration of an honorarium. The great soldier, under no illusions as to his own aptitudes or tastes in æsthetic matters, never affected to be moved by any inspirations in regard to such matters. In architecture, in painting, in sculpture, the appeal made itself essentially to the natural objectivity of his mind. In a building, for example, he looked for solidity, rapidity of construction and economy. He was, indeed, so insistent on the first of these qualities, as likely to contribute towards the immortalisation of his own name, that had he possessed greater patience, said David, on one occasion, he must surely have built in granite. He was also a consistent advocate of iron for bridge-construction as well as for domes, even suggesting the employment of that metal for the pillars of the Pantheon. Swiftness in execution —this was a prime requisite of all his conceptions, and the fact carries its own explanation, showing,

as it does, that his vanity, far more than any consideration of the æsthetic, counted in all his architectural projects. In June, 1810, he wrote to Montalivet urging him to greater activity in the building of the Arc de Triomphe :

" I want to finish with this structure," he said, " and if you cannot work more quickly, I will make a supplementary appropriation of £24,000 to enable you to do so."

Daru, supposedly the connoisseur of the Imperial entourage, once wrote to the directors of the Musée des Gobelins informing them that it was Napoleon's desire that artists should confine themselves to historical scenes depicting the story of France, and it was in much the same strain that he urged David to give up painting the classical ages and confine himself to national—that is, Napoleonic — subjects. Again, in organising various competitions among artists, the Emperor insisted on historical subjects dealing with France as the first condition of successful candidacy. The sculptors were officially informed by a decree of 1806 that in the matter of bas-reliefs and statuary, the choice of subjects was to be made from : (1) the exploits of Napoleon ; (2) from the story of the Revolution ; (3) from the history of France. A premium was to be placed on any work which should humiliate England and Russia, and William the Conqueror was suggested as a model always likely to touch Englishmen in their tendcrest susceptibilities. In 1805 he wrote to Talleyrand urging that Minister to begin a

campaign having for its object the staging of "*comédies de circonstance*," as well as the composition of ballads and music-hall songs bearing on his projected invasion of England.

In the same year was issued another official note to the artistic brotherhood, in which it was stated that "all artists who by 15th August shall not have delivered their commissioned works, will be held to be unequal to the exigencies of government work." The Corsican evidently counted inspiration and temperament for minus factors in æsthetical productions. And with the commissions—what an artillery of instructions, delivered sergeant-major fashion! Thus, to Gérard for his picture which presents Napoleon surrounded by his staff, signing the Swiss Act of Mediation:

"Above all, put every possible magnificence into the uniforms of the officers attending on Napoleon, and a corresponding *simplicity* of detail for the Emperor, so that he shall stand out all the more clearly in the whole scene."

Daru, on another occasion, ordered a series of miniatures of the Emperor, who was to be "represented with a rather pleasing (*gracieuse*) face." One of the best critiques passed upon Napoleon's æsthetic notions in painting was that which declared him to have appreciated David's reputation rather than his talent. The Imperial taste was predisposed rather to the work of Gros, his favourite, and to Gérard and Vernet; also to "anecdotal" painters like Prudh'on and Robert

Lefèvre. In regard to Gros, who painted the Jaffa picture, Napoleon was ever enthusiastic, and on inspecting that work of art declared that it was "a real masterpiece" and that its "miracle of chiaro-oscuro placed it on a level with the best work of Tintoretto and Paul Veronese."

Napoleon had his own private collection at La Malmaison, and authorities declared that it provided an excellent index of his general artistic taste, as well as of that of Josephine. Gérard, Dow, Albrecht Durer, Champaigne, Murillo, Rubens, Teniers, Van Ostade, Fra Bartolomeo were all represented in this gallery, and Rembrandt's *Descent from the Cross* was also included. He declared at St Helena that the Duke of Parma in 1797 had offered him £80,000 to be allowed to retain Correggio's famous *Saint Jerome* from among the vast collection which Bonaparte was then despoiling. Many of his advisers suggested that the money was more necessary than the paintings. The young Corsican disagreed, however, and on the ground that the money would soon be spent, whilst *Saint Jerome* would remain an ornament of the French capital for ever, and could not fail to inspire other masterpieces. From the Grand Duke of Tuscany he stole the Medici *Venus* for admittedly the same reason.

Following are among the principal paintings and other works of art which adorned Napoleon's private galleries at La Malmaison :

François Albane : *Nature—a woman suckling her children.*

François Albane : *Diana bathing with her Nymphs.*

Barbieri : *Saint Sebastian.*

Le Bachiche : *The Fates.*

A. Carracci : *Venus and Love.*

S. Ferrato : *Copy of Raphael's Madonna della Sedia.*

J. B. Greuze : *Young Girl's Head.*

Murillo : *The Virgin and St Ann.*

Rubens : *Descent from the Cross.* Taken from a Capuchin monastery at Lierre, near Antwerp.

Rubens : *Women Bathers surprised by Storm.*

Raphael : *Holy Family.*

Raphael : *St George*; *St Michael.*

Del Sarto : *Holy Family.*

Teniers : *A Flemish Kitchen.*

Titian : *The Toilet of Venus.*

Da Vinci : *St Margaret.*

Da Vinci : *Virgin suckling her Son.*

P. Veronese : *Woman holding a Child.*

P. Veronese : *A Venetian Family.*

C. J. Vernet : *Italian Landscape at Sunset.*

Gérard : *Portrait of Princess Caroline Bonaparte.*

Laurent : *Full-length Portrait of Josephine.*

Unknown : *A City in Flames.*

Unknown : *Equestrian Portrait of Napoleon.*

Unknown : *Portrait of Frederick the Great.*

Van Dyck : *Children of Charles I. of England.*

VAN DYCK : *Portrait of Charles I. and his Consort.*

MURILLO : *The Nativity.*

HOLBEIN : *Portrait of Laura.*

DAVID : *Children of Brutus.*

P. P. PRUDH'ON : *The Four Seasons.*

CHAPTER VIII

DAVID, THE IMPERIAL PAINTER

David in 1797—His Meeting with Bonaparte—A Visit to the Atelier—A Soldier's Blunt Criticism—"These Military Philistines"—David's Promotion—Bonaparte crossing the Alps—David and his School—A Lover of the Limelight—David and the Coronation—A Painter's Whole Ambition—Gérard and the Coronation Picture—A Happy Suggestion—Pauline Bonaparte and Gérard—Napoleon's Satisfaction—David and the Légion—The Douglas Portrait of the Emperor—David and the Peerage

LONG before Bonaparte had revealed, in the campaign of Italy, his genius for war, David was the most celebrated painter in France. He had played a considerable part in the tortuous political intrigues which closed the Revolutionary era, had been a partisan of the popular side, and even suffered imprisonment for having criticised with too much candour the policies of self-interested leaders.

Born in 1784, he had already won a European reputation with his *Horatii*, his *Socrates*, his famous *Paris and Helen* and several portraits. He was well known, therefore, to Bonaparte when the latter, after the battle of Rivoli, invited him to join his victorious army, thus presenting him with a rare opportunity of committing to canvas the scenes of several celebrated battles. David refused, pleading other engagements, but nevertheless retained a kindly recollection of the young conqueror's interest. The artist was at that time engaged on the famous *Sabine Women*, and he was not to meet Bonaparte until the latter returned to Paris, when the secretary of the Directory, M. Lagarde, gave a banquet at which the Corsican was the guest of honour. He had stipulated for the presence of David, whose work had much impressed him, he said. Monsieur Lagarde agreed, and although he had no particular acquaintance with David, called immediately on the latter requesting the honour of his company. David declined, under some pretext or other, and it was only when Lagarde explained to him the

quandary in which the refusal placed him, that the artist amiably consented to accept.

General Bonaparte's sense of social decencies was evidently not a profound characteristic, for on the occasion of this banquet, having taken Madame Lagarde in to dinner, he requested another guest to occupy his place at the lady's right hand, and himself sat down by the side of David, who tells us that it was during this meeting he solicited the honour of painting the General's portrait. Some days afterwards Bonaparte proceeded to the artist's famous studio near the Luxembourg, accompanied by two aides-de-camp. In accordance with his pretence of sinking the military man and affecting the *savant*, on his return from Italy, the General, David informs us, was dressed in civilian garb—a dark blue frock-coat, a large black cravat, an enormous hat *à cornes* and his hair heavily powdered. A sitting of three hours was given the painter, and, as might be expected, Bonaparte did not fail to show his impatience. He concluded the interview amiably, nevertheless, by inviting David to accompany him on his expedition to Egypt—an adventure which the artist refused on the ground of his fifty years.

When they met again, after Bonaparte's return from the Nile, David had just put the last touches to his *Rape of the Sabine Women*. Paris —indeed all artistic Europe—was then talking of this work, although the critics were by no means unanimous in its praise. There was a lack of

force in the whole composition, an absence of the suggestion of full movement, a failure to hint the required violence in such a tumultuous scene, the critics said. Bonaparte, preferring to judge for himself, decided to visit the *atelier* and was received by the master.

"I never saw soldiers fight as you make your soldiers fight, Monsieur David," he said, after inspecting the canvas. "Let me show you how soldiers fight," and the General throws himself into the attitude of a soldier doing execution with his bayonet.

David replies that it was not his intention to represent modern French soldiers, but warriors of antiquity.

"But your warriors," Bonaparte goes on querulously, "lack fire, lack action and lack enthusiasm, my dear David. Take my advice and change all that. You will find that the public will be of my opinion."

"These military Philistines know nothing about Art," cried David, when the First Consul had left. The artist did not easily forgive the Corsican for his somewhat brutal criticism—all the more so because his fellow-artists were of opinion that the painter's conception and execution were quite sound. Bonaparte made him some amends soon after by appointing our artist to be inspector of the schools of Fine Arts in Francc. It became customary thereafter for the Consul to take David on a tour of Paris, asking the painter for suggestions as to the embellishment of the city,

and in the course of these excursions, it is worth noting, David—an old Revolutionary—detailed to Bonaparte the grandiose schemes which the Revolutionary Fathers had entertained for making Paris the first capital of the world. David it was who suggested the modernisation of the Invalides —originally the work of Louis XIV.—as we know that famous edifice to-day.

On his return from Marengo, the First Consul expressed a wish to be painted again, and David, sensible of the honour, suggested a picture of Bonaparte in battle, sword in hand.

"No, my dear David," objected the General, "battles are not won with swords. I prefer to be portrayed in repose," and he goes on to give the painter some idea of what he thinks portraiture should be. David insists on longer sittings, only to evoke the First Consul's ire.

"An exact portrait," he cries, "does not, I imagine, consist just in confining oneself to accuracy in details—a wart on the nose, for instance. What is necessary is not so much the physiognomy, as the soul of the subject."

"But one condition does not exclude the other, General," objects David.

"Did Alexander ever sit to Apelles, think you?" Bonaparte continues. "No one nowadays asks if the portraits of great men were like them. It is sufficient that their genius should be shown in the picture."

"Verily you teach me the art of painting," replies the artist. "But I feel that you are right and

will paint you without troubling you for sittings." The result was *Bonaparte crossing the Alps*, one of the best-known tableaux representing Napoleon.

It is proper to chronicle here the fact that most of his biographers refuse—and in our view quite properly—to believe that David allowed a soldier to dictate to him as to the manner in which a painting should be executed. An artist so long celebrated was hardly likely to admit that even a First Consul could teach him anything about painting, says David's grandson and voluminous biographer, J. L. Jules David. In flattering the omnipotent Bonaparte, the artist may, however, have had in view his life's great ambition, which was to occupy in matters of Art the same position which the First Consul held as regards the national Executive. A short time before Marengo he had refused the official position offered to him by Bonaparte, because the decree described him merely as "the painter of the government." Bonapartism had already entered into fashion, and David, small blame, wanted to be supreme in his own domain.

The painter's eldest son posed, in the sequel, for the figure of Bonaparte in the stately canvas. Gérard was also on one occasion called into his master's service to the same end, the youthful pupil posing for that heroic gesture which represents the Conqueror with the right arm outstretched and pointing upward. It is not long, however, before Gérard begins to tire, and his master chaffs him on his lack of stamina.

"*Tenez*, Gérard," cries David, at last, "come off that ladder and take my palette. You can paint the arm much better than you pose for it."

The work was completed on 21st September 1801, and duly exposed for the public's inspection —at so many francs a head! A long polemic followed in the papers, dealing with the painter's exploitation of the patriotism of his fellow-citizens, and it was long before David heard the end of his little *harpagonade*.

The story of David's relations with Bonaparte includes that of the relations of his pupils Gérard, Gros, Isabey and other painters with the conqueror of Italy. Isabey's two pictures *General Bonaparte at La Malmaison* and his *Review by the First Consul at the Tuileries* are probably the most popular works of that artist. Gros had already become celebrated by his noted tableau representing the plague at Jaffa, and had been instrumental, moreover, in bringing Bonaparte's attention to the merits of his master, when, armed with letters of introduction to Josephine, he joined the headquarters of the Army of Italy. Nor had he failed to make the most of his kindly reception at the hands of the Corsican. His pupils, hardly less than David, were well known, therefore, to Bonaparte on the eve of the establishment of the Empire, a short time before which event the Emperor-elect summoned his painter-in-chief to the Tuileries, asking him on what particular work he was then engaged. The story of Leonidas and his Spartans at Thermopylæ—the subject

no of the painter's actual work—evidently made appeal to Napoleon.

"You are wrong, David," he said, "to waste your time painting beaten warriors."

"But," objected the artist, "these vanquished heroes were as great as their conquerors."

"Never mind," replied Napoleon testily; "the name of Leonidas is the only one which has come down to us. The rest are all lost to history."

As he left after his audience, Lucien Bonaparte, who had also been present, accosted the painter.

"You must understand, my dear David," explained Lucien, "that my brother Napoleon takes an interest only in pictures in which he counts for something. It is his weakness and he has no objection at all to being in the limelight."

Soon after David was given the Legion of Honour, and at the establishment of the Empire was appointed first painter to the Emperor, with the commission to execute in detail the ceremonies connected with the coronation of Napoleon. It is hardly necessary to go into the story of this spectacular episode in the history of the Corsican. Nevertheless, the *mise en scène* of the ceremony counted for so much in David's composition that we may recall the short description by Thiers:

"On the altar lay the crown, the sceptre, the sword, the mantle. The Pope, according to the ancient custom, touched the Emperor on the forehead, the arms and palms with the sacred oil, blessed the sword which he also buckled on, the sceptre which he placed in the Imperial hands,

and then approached the altar to take the crown.

"Napoleon, however, closely watching his movements, seized the crown from the Pontiff's outstretched hands—not roughly, as it was said, but with decision—and placed it upon his own head. This action, the significance of which was clear to all present, produced an indescribable effect upon the assembly. Then the Emperor took up the second crown and, approaching Josephine as she knelt before him, placed it with evident tenderness upon the head of his Consort, who forthwith gave way to tears."

David himself tells us of the many annoyances which the Imperial commission caused him, more particularly during the rehearsal for his final sittings, when pretentious courtiers, for whom the clock meant nothing, quarrelled with each other for precedence in the foreground of the great tableau. Finally, an official decree assigned to each personage a proper place. David, it may be said, had been given a suitable *loge* during the ceremony at Notre Dame, and there had made a rough draft of the scene at a highly dramatic moment—the Emperor in the act of crowning himself, as he had at first designed the work. Before starting on this tableau, the painter sent in a requisition for £1000, and Napoleon, to whom the request was submitted at Milan, scrawled across his paymaster's note the following words :—

"If M. David has not yet received any money on account of the work of the Coronation on which

he is now engaged, I see no objection to his being paid 25,000 francs "—the required sum.

In pursuance of his ambition to preside over the destinies of artistic France, David addressed a memorial in 1805 to the Emperor, soliciting for himself the position which Lebrun had occupied during the reign of Louis XIV. The Revolutionary of the days of Robespierre had long since learned the arts of the courtier, and the style adopted by the painter towards his Imperial patron was worthy of the most flattering effusions of the days of the Roi-Soleil. His candid biographer and grandson, Jules, declares, *sans façons*, that his grandsire's real object in soliciting a superior official post was to effect the removal of Denon from the headship of the Muséum Art Gallery, a post which gave its holder an authoritative voice in all concerns connected with the Fine Arts, even to a control of the contracts for civic edifices. Napoleon, it would seem, never saw the memorial, since David received no acknowledgment as to his proposals. Denon executed the Colonne Vendôme, it will be remembered, and never once lost the Emperor's favour.

About this time Napoleon gave David a commission to execute a portrait of himself in regalia, for the city of Genoa. The work was submitted for Imperial inspection on 4th July 1806, when Napoleon refused to accept it, "as being so badly done that if the portrait were sent into Italy, it could not fail to give the Italians a poor idea of our art." In this explanation it is certainly

not hard to divine the Corsican in search of an excuse.

David's enemies soon heard of his bad fortune, however, and it was rumoured that the painter had confided the Genoa portrait to one of his least skilful pupils. Great hopes were accordingly entertained by the opposition that the fall of the Maestro was imminent, all the more credibly so because Regnault—the painter of the *Education of Achilles*—had also been commissioned to execute a portrait of the Emperor. Regnault was, nevertheless, not more successful than David, who, well knowing that his rival had engaged in many intrigues for supplanting him, took his revenge in a *bon mot* which swiftly went the tour of artistic Paris.

"Well, Regnault," he said, on their meeting at the *Institut*, "it appears the Emperor is not satisfied with our portraits. As likely as not, too, because I did not paint mine, as it is rumoured, and because you painted yours."

The Coronation picture took some three years to execute, and the artist Rouget tells us that the greater part of the work was entrusted to his ablest pupils, David himself just giving the finishing touches. Gérard was one of the first to examine the completed canvas, and the master, knowing his old pupil to be a man of sound judgment, was anxious to hear his opinion. On arriving at the principal figure, that of the Emperor in the act of crowning himself, Gérard said :

"If you will permit me, *cher maître*, I must confess that the movement of the Emperor

crowning himself and holding his left hand on the hilt of his sword, in an attitude of defiance, is not very happy. It gives me the impression of being exaggerated and theatrical, and will not be especially pleasing to Napoleon. Perhaps the Emperor in the act of crowning the Empress would present something more lofty and impressive—more of that noble simplicity which we expect to find in your art, dear *maître*."

"*Diable!*" returns David, all alert. "Do you really think it would be an improvement, Gérard?"

"I certainly think so," replies the ex-pupil, with great frankness.

"Of course," objects the master, "it will mean a big job to substitute the proposed figures. Nevertheless, you may be right, my friend, and we shall see what can be done."

"Oh," exclaims Gérard grandly, "if it is only a matter of time, let myself and Barbier help you. Say but the——"

"Thanks, thanks," replies David, rather darkly; "but I could not dream of taking you from your own labours. Rouget and I can make any changes required."

Gérard has hardly left the studio when David turns to Rouget:

"What do you think of Gérard's idea?" he asks.

"*Ma foi*," says honest Rouget, "I think it worth considering."

"Frankly," agrees David, "I think it good myself. The fellow may, indeed, be right. It

will be more gallant—more like a Frenchman; and, again, Napoleon will not appear to be so wholly engrossed in himself."

So Rouget set about removing the self-crowning figure of Napoleon, and David replaced it with the one we all know—the Emperor in the act of crowning Josephine. Some days after the completion of the new picture, Princess Pauline Bonaparte—the youngest sister—accompanied by Gérard, calls at the studio. The Princess is immediately attracted to the portrait of her august brother, and, with her usual thoughtlessness, turns to Gérard, who had evidently been talking, and says:

"The Emperor looks well. It is, indeed, an excellent idea"—referring, of course, to the effected alteration.

We are hardly surprised to hear, then, that David, when his visitors had left, turned to Rouget with the words:

"You see, my friend, if I had allowed Gérard to touch my canvas, people would have said that he had done the whole thing himself."

Nevertheless, it was said that David had to solicit permission from the Emperor to effect the suggested changes—in all probability the fact, since official sanction had already been given to the first conception submitted. The Emperor, with the Genoa portrait in mind, probably, paid his painter more than one surprise visit, during which he commented favourably or unfavourably, just as the fancy caught him. On one occasion

he remarked on the simple attitude of the Pope —originally depicted with his hands extended idly on his knees.

"*Pardi*, David," exclaims the blunt soldier. "I did not bring the Pope all the way from Italy to do just nothing at all."

The artist wisely changed the figure to the extent of showing the Pope in the act of giving his pontifical blessing. David relates himself how both Emperor and Empress, on another occasion, paid him a State visit, accompanied by chamberlains, pages, equerries and maids-of-honour. Napoleon is evidently in the best of humours.

"What!" he cries, "but this is life, not art —action, action everywhere! How well my mother looks, and how well the Pope! You have done famously, Monsieur David, and I am quite satisfied."

And with this the Emperor uncovers his head to the great artist. The Empress, *attendrie* to the verge of tears, then pays her compliment to David, and the courtiers, after their simian fashion, proceed to exhaust the lexicon of eulogy.

David was appointed Officier de la Legion d'Honneur shortly after this, when the Emperor, anxious to have the artist's canvas *Socrates*, asked where it was. On being told, he commissioned David to repurchase it, giving him *carte blanche* in the matter of price. The owner, a M. de Courbeton, declared that he considered it priceless, but since the Emperor wanted the work, they might send to fetch it. David reported

Photograph: Alinari

THE CORONATION OF NAPOLEON
By David

to Napoleon, who, unexpectedly enough, showed the better side of his character.

"It is evident that he wishes to keep your picture. Let him," he decided.

In 1810 a reigning Marquis of Douglas ordered from David a full-length portrait of Napoleon. The artist accordingly represented the Emperor in the uniform of the Chasseurs de la Garde, in the act of leaving his study where he has passed the night at work, as is indicated by the candles, which have guttered out, as well as by a *pendule*, which points to four o'clock; on a sofa to the right lies the Imperial sword. This tableau now belongs to Prince Roland Bonaparte. When the work was submitted to Napoleon before being dispatched to Scotland, he warmly expressed his pleasure.

"You have, indeed, caught me this time, David," he said. "At night I work for the welfare of my subjects; in the day-time for their glory."

The last meeting of the painter with Napoleon took place during the Hundred Days, when, after a short visit to the famous *atelier*, the Emperor conferred on David the insignia of a Commander of the Legion of Honour. It was also said that Napoleon had created his painter a Baron of the Empire, a tradition, says his grandson, which is not supported by any documentary evidence. David was among those who voted for the death of Louis XVI., and it is certain that the letters-patent, if ever issued, were destroyed at the Restoration of the Bourbons.

As we have noted elsewhere, the story of the Imperial Painter includes that of Gros, of Gérard and of Isabey. The last-named of these was the only one who displayed any independence of character in his dealings with Napoleon, and once refused to supervise an historical painting which dealt with the Imperial legend until his collaborating fellow-artists were adequately remunerated. Napoleon consented to the increase of stipend.

CHAPTER IX

CANOVA AND NAPOLEON

Canova a Great Philanthropic Spirit—Bonaparte and the Sculptor—Canova's Independence—The Condition of Rome—Modelling the First Consul—Napoleon as a Sculptor's Subject—An Heroic Statue of the Corsican—Mars and Venus—The Ingénue Pauline—A Chatsworth Treasure—Canova and the French Capital—A Bust of Marie Louise—The Farnese Hercules—The Pope's Art Patronage—The Borghese Marbles—The Sculptor's Style—Napoleon and Rome—The Corsican's Cautiousness—Art and Religion—Protestants and Catholics—Arrogance of the Priests—Napoleon on Cæsar—"The Great Man of the Great People"—The Corsican and the Pope—Canova's Advice to the Emperor—Oligarchic Venice—A Candid Admission—The Day of Wagram—Canova and Marriage—Monsieur de Bouclon's Canonisation

WITH characteristic enthusiasm, patriotic Italian writers of the time of Napoleon's Italian campaign, 1796-1797, were wont to declare that their celebrated artist Canova was comparable with the young Corsican conqueror. *Valeva per certo il Buonaparte*, as they used to put it. Memoirs and journals of those moving days indicate very clearly the exalted regard in which the great sculptor was held by every class of his countrymen, and it would also seem established that by his noble personal character, by his activities in public well-doing and by the lofty appeal of his artistic productions, Canova has won, we think, a permanent claim to rank among the distinguished philanthropic spirits of all time. It was not long, accordingly, before Napoleon determined to attach this world-celebrity to his already princely suite, and as Alexander had willed to be painted by Apelles, so the conqueror of Italy decided that Canova should commit him in marble to posterity.

The sculptor was then in his fortieth year, exhausted somewhat by labours which had included, among many more, his famous *Daedalus and Icarus*, executed in his twenty-first year, his *Theseus*, his *Cupid and Psyche*, his *Venus and Adonis* and his *Hercules*. Papal munificence and patronage had made him in his day the wealthiest artist in Italy, and already he entertained thoughts of retiring to his country estate; all the more insistently, too, because those fervent hopes which Italian patriots had placed in the triumph-

ant progress of Bonaparte against the Austrians had proved tragically fruitless. Fallen Venice, erstwhile an appanage of the House of Habsburg, was now in the grasp of a new dictator, who, says de Bouclon, gave his arrogant commands in a language which Venetians had not even the advantage of understanding.

It was not, however, until 1802 that the Italian was personally to meet Bonaparte, who had commissioned his minister at Rome, Bourrienne, to inform Canova of the First Consul's desire that the sculptor should execute his bust. The terms mentioned were 120,000 francs (£4800) and all expenses. The artist objected in the first place to the tone of Bourrienne's instructions to himself as savouring too obviously of a master's order to a servant, as he declared. In the second, he had never forgiven Bonaparte—an Italian, in reality—for having, by the Treaty of Campo-Formio, reduced Northern Italy to a condition which was hardly less than bondage. Above all, the depredations of Bonaparte and his Generals in the treasure-houses of Piedmont, Lombardy and Venice had caused him a sorrow the poignancy of which was many times emphasised in the case of an artist who was at the same time an ardent Italian patriot.

"I do not refuse to acknowledge the well-deserved glory of the First Consul," Canova explained to Cacault, the French Ambassador at Rome, who added his entreaties to those of the Minister; "he has rendered great services to our

religion and to our civilisation, both of which he has rescued from savagery. In my opinion, he is greater than Alexander or Hannibal, or even Cæsar. Nevertheless, I cannot help seeing in him an oppressor of Italy—a man equally guilty with those sovereigns who once partitioned Poland. I decline to execute the bust of such a prince."

The Frenchman's reply, although a model of diplomatic persuasiveness, failed to move the sculptor.

"Nature," said the adroit ambassador, "has at times produced great men of different kinds, and such great spirits, when contemporary, surely owe each other support, affection, loyalty. Alexander and Apelles could never have been enemies. To-day the great spirit of France calls to the great spirit of Italy."

It was only when the Pope, Pius VII., and Cardinal Consalvi, an especial favourite of Bonaparte, urged the sculptor, on grounds of practical patriotism, to fulfil the First Consul's virtual command, that Canova consented to "obey, as a slave obeys his master." Freedom, Canova added, in a sonorous phrase, can alone mother the designs of great artists. In October, 1802, he left Rome for Paris—in a carriage which the First Consul had especially provided for the journey.

"In his relations with the man who saw Europe trembling at his feet, Canova," says M. de Bouclon, "shewed a virility of character equal to his talents; the artist indeed proved himself as great a man as the commander." An expression of

opinion with which few will be found to disagree, for on being presented to the First Consul, who received him with the most gracious condescension, the Italian, in reply to inquiries about Rome, replied :

" I ask permission, General, to speak with the truthfulness and candour that are common with me. You ask news of Rome : Rome, I may say, has fallen to a depth proportionate to the height which you yourself have reached. The victories which have placed you in the same rank with Cæsar have been as disastrous for the queen-city of the world, as they have proved glorious for your own name. Rome languishes in poverty, her palaces are despoiled, her time-honoured treasures are in the hands of strangers ; war-imposts have deprived her of her financial resources, while the closing of her ports, by your own orders, do not allow her to repair her losses."

" I intend," replied Bonaparte, with unruffled equanimity, " to restore Rome. As the well-wisher of mankind, I intend also to be its benefactor. In the meantime, however, what do you require for the work you have undertaken ? "

" Nothing," said Canova. " I am ready to execute your orders."

" Good : then you shall do my statue," replied Bonaparte, and dismissed the Italian.

During the next weeks the soldier sat for one hour daily to the artist, Josephine being present at times. True to his sense of time-economy, Bonaparte received officials and signed documents

during each séance, and even fingered through literary works which had just been published, while Canova modelled the features of his illustrious sitter. Politics naturally counted for something in the conversations which took place between the artist and his model, and on one occasion Bonaparte declared it to have been his intention to remove to Paris the famous bronzes of Saint Mark at Venice. Whereupon Canova bluntly replied :

" The fall of that Republic will darken the rest of my life "—an indication of his patriotic sentiments which did not displease Bonaparte.

His usual frankness to Napoleon considered, we may properly conclude that it was by no means in the way of flattery that the Italian on one occasion addressed the First Consul in the following complimentary terms, as he studied the bust he had just modelled :—

" Your countenance," he told Bonaparte, very correctly, " is so favourable to the work of the sculptor that if we were to discover it among ancient remains, it would appear evident at once that it was the bust of one of the great men of Antiquity. If I have modelled well, the work will be a success. It is, however, not the sort of face which pleases the fair sex. Bonaparte has too much of Hannibal in him to possess very much of Alcibiades."

Having accomplished the preliminaries necessary to his great work, Canova decided to return to Italy and complete the statue in Carrara. M. de

Bouclon gives an instance of the finesse—some would call it by an uglier term—of the First Consul in connection with the departure from Paris of the great artist. On his arrival in order to take leave of Bonaparte, the latter received him at the same time as an envoy from Tunis, to whom, through the medium of an interpreter, he addressed a solemn harangue, urging the duty incumbent on the authorities of that barbaric State to safeguard the interests of its Christian subjects.

"Go back to the Pope," said the First Consul, turning to Canova, "and tell him that you have heard me preaching the perfect liberty of Christians."

Bonaparte understood clearly, comments Bouclon, that in order to leave a favourable impression of his character and personality on the mind of the sculptor, it was necessary to show that he was a good Catholic. Without religion, he could be no hero for Canova. Nor, we may conclude, was it altogether of his own direct initiative that the French Ambassador at Rome gave a magnificent reception in honour of the home-coming artist. The statue of Bonaparte was to be executed after the style of the *Farnese Hercules*, and to be ten feet in height.

It is interesting to recall here a *bon mot* of Canova in regard to his gigantic figure of Napoleon. The sculptor had requisitioned from Carrara an enormous block of marble, and therefrom had carved his heroic effigy of the Conqueror, with

the right arm outstretched. Monsieur Artaud, then secretary of the French Embassy, drew Canova's attention to the amount of valuable material which must go to waste in the loss of the marble which lay below the extended arm.

"No," the sculptor answered; "under the arm of Mars I found my Venus."

For this Venus—which is now in Florence and a replica of which, also by Canova, is at Lansdowne House—it will be remembered, Pauline Bonaparte posed, and the reflection that brother and sister were sculpt—if such a word there be—from the same block of stone, is not without a certain subtle pathos of its own, since each enmarbled figure must remain, throughout the ages, equally an emblem of the general motherhood of Earth and of the fleeting tragedy of kingly grandeur. Pauline Bonaparte was not, it would seem, more scrupulous in the domain of moral proprieties than her august brother was careful of the political proprieties. Did not the fair Princess once, in this regard, give her friends the measure of her sense of what was quite proper? She posed, it will be recollected, for Canova's Venus, in the all-but-altogether, a fact which soon became known to fair prudes of the social world. One such candid friend affected to be very much shocked that Pauline should so far have forgotten the common decencies of modest womanhood:

"And did you not feel somewhat—er—'m—inconvenienced?" she asked rather haltingly.

"Oh, of course, there was a *fire* in the room," the

Princess explained simply and without the least notion that she had done violence to propriety.

In 1805 Canova paid a second visit to Paris, when he presented the bust of 1802 to the Emperor, the larger statue being delivered only in 1808, at which time Napoleon may be supposed to have, to a great extent, outgrown his first perfervid cult of Antiquity and to have turned towards a distinctive Napoleonic style in all art and artistic matters. The fact remains that the heroic statue did not meet with its great prototype's approval. And Louis XVIII., in 1815, evinced no particular disposition to retain this somewhat startling memento of the triumphant supplanter of the Bourbons. The French Government accordingly presented it to Wellington, who, it was well known, developed after Waterloo a distinct monomania in the matter of Napoleonic effigies and relics. It is now at Chatsworth.

Canova's last meetings with Napoleon took place in 1810, when he was summoned—not invited—to Paris. On 12th October of that year, Marshal Duroc conducted him into the presence of the Emperor who, as in the case of Goethe's presentation at Erfurt, was at breakfast. The Empress Marie Louise was also present.

"You have grown thin, Monsieur Canova," said the Emperor, with what may be imagined to be a kind of affected solicitude for the sculptor's health. Napoleon had sought through his Italian agents to induce the Italian to take up his residence in Paris, and the object of the artist's present

visit was the execution of a statue of the Empress. Canova had declared that, while anxious to please the Emperor in all possible respects, a permanent change in the scene and method of his life was absolutely contrary to the interests of his art. These objections the sculptor renewed in person to Napoleon on the occasion of his third and last visit to the Emperor.

In vain did the great soldier seek to dazzle the unaffected Italian with prospects of a splendid social and official rôle in the capital of the world, as he put it: Canova was to be appointed to the academic and exclusive Senate; to be given the high supervision of all the schools of Art; he was to reside at the Louvre, where visiting kings were customarily lodged. Canova remained unmoved, however, and declared with his usual candour, that, apart from the commission of committing to marble the lineaments of Marie Louise, his principal object was to plead the cause of rapidly impoverishing Italy to its King.

"Sire," declared the artist, "you may dispose as you will of my life, for my services are always yours to command. I beseech you, nevertheless, to allow me to return to Rome, once the work for which I have come shall be completed."

The artist was dealing, however, with a supreme type of the man tenacious of his intention, and Napoleon, who allowed himself in no circumstances to be easily vanquished, did not hesitate to descend to something like threats to achieve his purpose:

"Here," he said, "you will be in your proper place, since Paris now houses all the great treasures of the classical ages. We only lack the *Farnese Hercules*, and even that we shall soon have."

"Your Majesty," cried the honest Italian, with all the warmth of a sincere indignation, "at least leave something to our old Italy! Those ancient monuments form an historic chain in the country's life which should not be broken by removals of our treasure from either Rome or Naples."

"But," Napoleon objected, "Italy can seek compensation by excavation work. I shall order some to be undertaken in Rome. Has the Pope spent much on enterprise of this kind, tell me?"

The Pope, as the Emperor well knew, was in those days a poor man and could ill spare the funds needful for underground exploration in search of art treasures. Canova recalled the fact to his Imperial patron, going on to indicate his general views as to treasure-trove — somewhat naïf, perhaps, considering the character of the Corsican.

"The Roman people," he said, "possesses an inviolable right to all monuments found upon its own territory, since these are in a certain sense an inherent product of the soil, and neither the Romans nor the Pope may dispose of what are really national and natural heirlooms."

Napoleon here interrupted the artist to inform him that he had paid fourteen million francs (£560,000) for the *Borghese Marbles* which, it

may be mentioned in passing, Prince Camillo had been forced to surrender, without the option of ransoming them. As against this vast sum Napoleon referred somewhat contemptuously to the few hundred thousand *lire* which the Pope expended annually on art purchases, whereupon Canova correctly reminded the Emperor that the Pope's poverty had been largely forced upon him by the French armies of invasion.

The conversation then turned upon the ten-foot statue which Canova had delivered in 1808, the Emperor declaring that he would have preferred it draped.

"God Himself," Canova replied candidly, "could not have executed a beautiful work of art if he had tried to represent your Majesty as you are dressed now—in top-boots and uniform. In Sculpture, as in all the other Arts, we have our sublime style, and the sublime style of the sculptor is the undraped figure, or else a style of drapery which is proper to our art—such as the *toga*. With regard to the equestrian statue which I am now executing of your Majesty, I could not represent your figure undraped, since my intention is to represent you in the act of commanding an army. This was customary with the ancient sculptors, as it is also customary with modern artists."

At this point Napoleon interrupted the Italian to ask him if the statue of 1808 was being cast in bronze, and on being answered in the affirmative, replied that it was his intention to visit Rome—

Photograph: Brogi

THE CHATSWORTH NAPOLEON

By Canova

an intention which was never carried into effect; for notwithstanding his worship of Antiquity and all that Rome represented for the ancient and modern worlds, it was somewhat extraordinary in Napoleon's fate that he should never have seen the Eternal City. Canova encouraged his Imperial patron in this idea of looking " with his own eyes " upon the home of the Cæsars, and readily conjured up visions of Trajan's Forum, the Capitol, the triumphal arches, the Via Sacra, the Appian Way and the many columns of victory.

" It was not only our political greatness, but also our love of the grandiose which produced so many works of magnificence," the sculptor declared; and the words take the general reader down to Zola's wondrous psychological study, in *Rome*, of the virtues and vices political and social which attend on the cult of the grandiose, and how this spirit has haunted the Eternal City under all its mighty masters.

Canova started to work on his task of modelling a bust of the Empress Marie Louise on 15th October 1810, and in accordance with his settled plan of never allowing his second Consort to remain alone with a strange man, Napoleon himself attended each séance given by the Empress to the Italian. It is solely in pursuance of our endeavour to present Napoleon in as many temperamental aspects as possible that we emphasise the curious trait in the Corsican's character which forbade him entertaining the notion that woman was at all trustworthy in her relations with the opposite

sex. Monsieur Frederic Masson, the voluminous historian of the Napoleoniad, declares, however, that it was not so much jealousy that suggested to him the necessity of "placing the youthful Empress in the impossibility of compromising herself." He did not understand woman, says Masson, although he was willing to legislate for her. He acted out of sheer dynastic prudence, for, as he told his Cabinet on one occasion, adultery is merely a matter of a sofa. And he remained to the end ever of the opinion that even an ordinary *tête-à-tête* between a man and a woman more often than not tended to take a "natural" turn.

Somewhere we remember to have read, in authentic memoirs, that the Empress Marie Louise once commanded a Court tradesman to submit certain designs in tapestry which had appealed to her taste. Accordingly the upholsterer presented himself in person at her Majesty's apartments, where we may suppose him to have spent some time paying out rolls of carpetry for inspection by his Imperial patroness. On leaving the rooms of the Empress, the upholsterer was pounced upon by the waiting Emperor, who, having ascertained the nature of the man's business, dismissed him with a brutal gesture and proceeded to his Consort's apartments, where, with eyes ablaze, we can imagine him to have demanded of her the meaning of her conduct. The poor young Empress declared with tears that the visitor was only an upholsterer!

"Never mind, it is enough that he was a *male*,

and had no business here," roughly replied Napoleon, whose jealous mind probably foresaw the possibility of his successor on the throne being a cross between an upholsterer and a Habsburg.

At the séance of 15th October the Emperor was anxious to hear from Canova something about the climate of Rome.

"Is it as unhealthy now as it was in the time of the Ancients ? " he inquired.

" It would seem so," replied the sculptor, who also remembered to have read in Tacitus that on the occasion of the return of the army of Vitellius from Germany, the soldiers fell ill after bivouacking on the Vatican Hill. Napoleon immediately rang for his librarian, who brought the *Annals.*

" The sickness of the soldiers proves little," the Emperor explained simply, sure of his *expertise* in such a matter; " troops that are rapidly transported from one climate to another soon fall ill, but just as quickly recover."

And Canova here takes advantage of the Emperor's curiosity about Rome to continue his advocacy of the Roman cause, urging the great one to put into immediate practice those designs for the restoration of the city which he was known to entertain. Napoleon assures him that it is his intention to make Rome the capital of Italy, incorporating Naples in his scheme of unification, an idea which gives the sculptor the opportunity of representing his views as to what is really necessary for the well-being of his compatriots. It is highly interesting to note that

Canova attributed much to the influence of Religion in Art :

" Religion, which is favourable to the Arts," he declared, " grows weaker and weaker in my country. Among the Egyptians, among the Greeks and the Romans, it was Religion alone that encouraged Art. The immense sums which were expended on the erection of the Pantheon, on the statue of Jupiter at Olympia, on that of Minerva at Athens—all this was due to Religion. With the Romans it was the same : their works bear the seals and emblems of Religion, and even Alaric, the Visigoth, respected the edifices of Religion as the real centres of culture and enlightenment."

After which and much more to the same purpose, Canova goes on, like the honest partisan he is, to declare that above all the Roman Catholic Church has been the true mother of Art :

" Sire," he said, " the Protestants are satisfied with a plain church and a Crucifix, and so have no need of beautiful objects of art, while the churches which they possess have been erected and adorned by Catholic artists."

" He is quite right," agreed the Emperor, turning to his Consort, " the Protestants have nothing beautiful."

All of which, on the part of both Canova and Napoleon, was somewhat in the nature of argumentation along very narrow and materialist grounds, it must be allowed. The soldier was on safer territory when he replied to Canova's

appeal for reconciliation with the Pope by assuring the artist of his willingness to do so, but for the arrogance of the clergy.

"The Priests," said the Emperor, with much cogency, "want to govern everywhere, want to interfere in all things, political as well as spiritual, and, like Gregory VII., are content with nothing less than absolute mastery. The Popes have always sought to keep the Italians in subjection, and that, too, even when they were not the absolute masters of Rome. What were the factions of the Orsini and the Colonna tribes, if not organised and subsidised intrigues to this especial end?"

And to an admission by Canova that the Popes had on several occasions—as in the reign of Alexander VI., of Julius II. and of Leo X.—begun the military conquest of Italy, Napoleon, in a very human touch, puts his hand to the hilt of his sword, answering with the easy nonchalance of the master who is certain of his subject:

"Only the sword can achieve conquest—*c'est l'épée qu'il faut.*"

"And not altogether the sword, Sire," retorts honest Canova; "the shepherd's crook—the crozier—is also an essential. Machiavelli himself could not decide which had contributed most to the greatness of Rome—the arms of Romulus or the religion of Numa. It is true, indeed, that these two forces must march together, and if the Popes have not distinguished themselves as warriors, they have in other ways written their

exploits upon the pages of history, and often with such splendour as to win universal admiration."

"Cæsar," cries Napoleon, interrupting him, "was the great man of the great people; and not only Cæsar, but other Emperors such as Titus, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius. The Romans were always great till the time of Constantine. The Popes made it their policy to maintain discord throughout Italy, and were always the first to call in the French and the Germans to fight their battles against the people."

This expression of opinion opens the way for the patriotic sculptor to make another appeal for his beloved Rome. Napoleon retorts by declaring that the Vatican had made it a settled policy to resist him wherever it could and how it could, and this notwithstanding the fact that the Emperor allowed the French Bishops to govern according to their own notions in all that concerned purely religious matters.

"Is there no religion here in France?" exclaims the Emperor. "Who restored the altars? Who protects the clergy? I require *my* share of obedience; but I find the Pope is altogether pro-German and pays most attention to what Vienna says." In saying which he looked pointedly at Marie Louise.

"Oh," retorted the young Empress bravely, "I can assure you that when I lived in Germany, they used to say that the Pope was altogether pro-French." Napoleon passes over this un-

expected sally and goes on to explain that he quarrelled with the Pope for refusing to expel the Russians and the British from his States.

"He even excommunicated me," fumes the Emperor, "and does not seem to realise that in the end, France may break off from Rome, even as the English and Russians broke away in their day."

Canova replies that such a schism would be a calamity for himself and his Empire—all the more so, says the plain-spoken sculptor, as he is about to become a father—an honour which could not at that date, 15th October, have been very distant, since the Emperor was married on 2nd April 1810 and the King of Rome was born on 20th March 1811. What Marie Louise thought of this bluff suggestion, which concerned herself so intimately, we do not learn. There is something that is far from displeasing, however, in this domestic and rather bourgeois scene, set as it were in a very desolation of greatness and splendour, and Napoleon, with unusual good humour and tact, closes the séance by reminding Canova that he, not less anxiously than the sculptor, desires to be on good terms with the Vicar of Christ.

In the succeeding séance the conversation turned on the glories of oligarchic Venice, when the Italian—who was of Venetian origin—expressed the view that the Republic would never have fallen had the State placed greater trust in the patriotism of its generals. The Venetian

oligarchs feared, said the sculptor, that a Cæsar might make his appearance and inevitably to their undoing. Whereupon the Emperor replies with the candid enough admission :

" You are right. I once told the Directory myself that if they continued to make war, a soldier would certainly arise in France who must end by dictating to themselves."

In advising Napoleon to safeguard the interests of the people of Florence in respect of their art treasures, the sculptor added that encouragement of Italian painters must redound all the more to the Imperial credit, since the House of Bonaparte had originally sprung from Italy.

" What ! " cries the Empress, turning to her Consort, " are you not a Corsican ? " and is surprised to hear that the Emperor is really of Italian origin, as Canova says, and as Napoleon admits with a suggestion of some pride. The Emperor does not, however, hold Italian painters in very high respect, and awards the superiority to French artists, who, he says, are not such good colourists, but are better in the matter of line-work.

Downright Canova sees nothing out of place in recommending both the Emperor and the Empress to look after their health. Napoleon, he thinks, overdoes it somewhat :

" *Que voulez-vous, donc ?* " replies the Emperor good-humouredly. " I have sixty millions of subjects, from eight to nine hundred thousand soldiers, one hundred thousand cavalry. The

Romans themselves never had so large a number. I have fought forty pitched battles, and at Wagram our artillery fired a hundred thousand shot. At that time," he adds gaily, looking at his youthful Consort, "this young lady was an Archduchess of Austria, and on the day of Wagram assuredly wished me dead."

"You are right," admits the Empress, with a bright laugh; "I certainly did."

The great sculptor had represented Marie Louise as Concord—her marriage with the Emperor in 1810 had brought about a short season of peace—and the result was pleasing to the illustrious couple. Canova in his *Memoirs* tells us that at their last meeting Napoleon asked if he was married.

"No, Sire," replied the sculptor simply, "I have been on the point of marrying several times, but many incidents preserved me my freedom. Besides, the fear of not being able to find a woman who should love me as I must certainly have loved her—this consideration enabled me to devote myself to Art alone."

Bouclon pays the tribute of a tear to this last interview between the Sculptor and the Conqueror. They only met again in heaven, he says.

Which is certainly a first-class compliment to Napoleon!

CHAPTER X

THE IMPERIAL MUSICIAN

Napoleon on Music—Italian Musicians versus German —National Value of Opera—Napoleon no Musician —His Plans for the Musical Art—The Eroica Symphony of Beethoven—Salaries of Official Singers—A Surprise for Vatican Celibates—La Belle Grassini—The Southern Temperament—Grassini's Disobedience —Proud Monsieur Paer—Grassini, Wellington and Napoleon—An Intellectual Singer

NAPOLEON, according to the *Correspondance,* once wrote as follows to the directors of the Conservatoire at Paris in regard to Music :—

"Of all the Fine Arts, Music is that which has most effect upon the passions. Consequently it is the one which the statesman should most encourage. A musical composition which calls forth the loftiest inspirations has far more practical influence than a reasoned discourse or a didactical essay, and touches the heart more deeply. . . . A cantata well executed awakens sympathy, and good-will arises from sympathy."

It was the opinion of the Emperor that the Italian School of Music was pre-eminently that which by appealing to the sympathies moved men to good dispositions and to resignation. The compositions of Germany, he said, except several of Mozart and a few others, appealed to the quality of action in man and had in them some suggestion of a rebellious note. Nevertheless, when Méhul composed his oratorio, *Joseph,* Napoleon assured him that the best way to merit his favour was to produce pieces which inspired heroic sentiments in the nation and the army. It is a tribute to the Corsican's fair-mindedness that when a composer of note produced an opera which displeased him, owing to a "political" tendency which he affected to find in it, the Emperor allowed it to be played "until the public could no longer digest it," as he held; the piece was soon forgotten, and neither the

author nor the public was deprived of due rights.

"The Opera," he once told his Council, "costs £32,000 yearly. Yet it is necessary to support an institution which flatters the national vanity, and we must subsidise it at the expense of other theatres. . . . Let us, therefore, have no vaudeville at the Opera, but only what is consistent with the dignity of a great national institution. . . . We might be induced to subsidise the Opera Comique to the extent of £4000 a year; but only on the express condition that first-class singers and actors shall consent to appear."

Like most men whose masculinity is the predominating trait of the whole character and temperament, Napoleon was not a lover of music and had no very willing ear for song. His secretaries, Fain, Chaptal, Bourrienne, Menéval, as well as his man Constant, all tell us that during his rare fits of idleness he was wont on occasion to burst into songful numbers of the homely or provincial kind, and on the eve of a campaign a frequent musical ditty on his lips was that which sings of Marlbrough on his way to the wars.

"It was a strong voice," says the body-servant simply, "but not pleasant to the ear, and it was his habit to sing thus when moving rapidly from one room to another in his *petits appartements*."

Napoleon's national programme was, however, too comprehensively laid out to allow of him overlooking the very just claims of the musical world—in our own opinion an art far above that

of the Drama—and provision was duly made, as we have seen, for opera and its exponents. Once, while attending a pupil's concert at the Conservatoire, he rewarded the singer of a simple air by Paisiello with a substantial money prize, Paisiello—the author of the famous *Chinese Idol* and the original *Barber of Seville*, on which theme Rossini improved — having been his favourite composer. This artist he summoned from Naples in 1802 and assigned to him the task of organising an Imperial orchestra for the Tuileries, at an honorarium of £850 yearly and a Court carriage. After he had made the acquaintance of Beethoven's music and heard what the connoisseurs had to say about that master's wondrous art, he set about making him the fashion, as he himself said, although his own tastes leaned towards the florid schools of Italy. Beethoven, who was a convinced Republican in politics, admired Napoleon as the ideal soldier until he assumed the purple and, indeed, called his famous *Eroica* symphony by the title Napoleon Bonaparte. After 1804, however, he declined politically to countenance the Corsican, and at the latter's death in 1821, on being asked to compose something in memory of the great departed, declared that he had already written his funeral march, referring to the *marche funèbre* in the said composition.

His singers were well paid as a rule, Crescentini and Brizzi receiving each £1200 yearly, besides perquisites; while Mesdames Grassini and Paer

were paid £1500 and £1200 respectively. The Imperial ballet had no complaint to make of its treatment, and here we recall that when Pope Pius VII. went to Paris in 1804 to crown the Emperor, an especial surprise was prepared for the Vicar of Christ and his Cardinals, when, during a grand musical representation, a large ballet of beautiful corybantic nymphs burst upon the stage and executed a sensational amount of "leg-business" directly over the heads of the astonished Vatican celibates.

To the composer Méhul, who was not a favourite of his, Bonaparte once declared that the music of the Germans and the French was "scientific," but without the sparkle and tunefulness of the Italian schools. Méhul, who evidently had a mind of his own, tried to defend the French exponents on the ground that their dramatic expression and psychology were superior. Napoleon objected to contradiction and replied querulously:

"That is just you, Méhul. You may have a great reputation, but your music bores me nevertheless."

"And what does that prove?" retorted the angry composer, immediately turning on his heel.

Napoleon was, however, not always so brutal with his musicians. Once Paisiello spatchcocked a beautiful air entitled *Sei Morali*, by Cimarosa, into his own opera, *I Zingari*, and during the rendering Napoleon could hardly contain his enthusiasm. Its rendition over, he turned to Paisiello, congratulating him:

"*Ma foi*," cried the Emperor, "the man who wrote that air can call himself the first composer in Europe."

"It is by Cimarosa," explained the disconcerted Maestro.

"I am sorry," returned Napoleon sympathetically, "but I cannot withdraw what I have said."

On the morrow his musician-in-chief received a handsome present.

To Lesueur, the composer of *Les Bardes*, Napoleon, on hearing the opera for the first time, gave the Legion of Honour and, a few days afterwards, a gold snuff-box stuffed with banknotes worth several hundred pounds.

Zingarelli, the composer of *Romeo e Giulietta*, once had a brush with the Corsican: at the birth of the King of Rome, the musician, then choirmaster at St Peter's, was given orders to have a *Te Deum* sung, but the Maestro refused on the ground that he knew no King of Rome but Pius VII. He was summoned at once to Paris, where he was commanded to compose a mass, paid in all some £600 for his work and sent home again. Another singer, Marchesi by name, during the campaign of Italy, was asked once by the youthful General to sing an air for his table company. The tenor replied by telling Bonaparte that if he wanted a good air he had only to take a turn in the garden and get some. They threw Marchesi out for his bad manners on that occasion; but on another he consented to sing, and Bonaparte and he made it up. Crescentini, the famous

castrato, was paid, as we have said, about £1200 yearly as first singer, besides large presents. Napoleon would not allow him to sing in public, and gave him the Order of the Iron Crown—an honour to which the existing Knights and Companions took exception, on the ground that Crescentini, a *castrato*, was not physically compos. La belle Grassini, however, took up the cudgels on the singer's behalf:

"What has his *wound* to do with the Iron Crown?" she asked plaintively. And Paris laughed.

This Signora Grassini, one of the most beautiful women of the age, and incontestably the first contralto of her time, entered for a generous consideration into the life of Napoleon. He first met her in Italy during the Italian Campaign when, according to his own account, the delicacy of his position—a youth commanding veteran generals—required from him the exercise of all his tact and circumspection. He was, however, very much *amourâché* of the fair songstress, and, according to Bourrienne, lived with her quite openly in Milan—a charge which Napoleon refuted at St Helena when he recalled that their intimacy only began in 1805. La Grassini, he told, marvelled that he could look upon her, in that year, when in 1797 he had refused the favours which she had been only too willing to grant him. It is certain, however, that she was officially attached to the Consular establishment in 1801, and Napoleon, Fouché tells, paid her

from his private purse £600 a month, insisting, however, that she should keep out of Josephine's way. Inevitably, Bonaparte could devote but a short time to love affairs, and Madame Grassini was clearly one of those southern natures which require unusually frequent blooding. We are hardly surprised to hear, then, that the lovely cantatrice soon proved faithless. There was a certain Rode, a violinist and composer in her orchestra, who attracted her attention and succeeded so far in capturing her heart that she consented to elope with him. Napoleon overlooked this escapade when, as Emperor, he placed her at the top of the list of official singers. She was charged by Napoleon in 1810 with refusing to attend the rehearsals for an opera, and Napoleon had her summoned to his presence. He was at breakfast when she arrived and the following dialogue took place :

" Grassini," frowned Napoleon, " you are preventing *us* from seeing the opera, by not attending rehearsals. You keep *our* musician waiting."

" Excuse me, Sire," replies Grassini, " but your musician keeps *me* waiting. It is etiquette in Italy for the first rehearsals of an opera to take place at the piano of the *Pr-rima Donna Assolutissima.* Paisiello, Cimarosa, Zingarelli—all these, who are quite as good as Monsieur Paer, I imagine, waited on *me.*"

" So-ho ! " cries Napoleon, swallowing an oyster. " What have *you* to say, Monsieur Paer ? "

The latter had laid the charge of insubordination.

"I cannot, Sire," explains the grandiloquent Maestro, "consent to wait on any *prima donna*, however eminent, however absolute. I may once have done so, and indeed, often carried my humble operas round to the residences of famous cantatrices —like any common bagman. But," and Paer draws himself up to the last line of his five foot two inches, and throws out a thirty-three chest, "that was, your Majesty, before I had the honour of being appointed director of music to the Emperor of the French. I thought, Sire, that it was due to my dignity to remain in my rank —more befitting the glory of Fra——"

"Ta, ta, ta," Napoleon interrupts testily "Monsieur Paer, you shall visit Madame Grassini once. Madame Grassini, you shall call on Monsieur Paer twice. *Bonjour.*"

Grassini in 1815 became the mistress of the victorious Duke of Wellington. From what the chroniclers tell us, she was not much impressed by this Anglo-Irish soldier, and much preferred her part-countryman, Bonaparte, for all his brusqueness and unsentimentality. Here, however, we may presume that the Duke's hopeless and unrequited infatuation for Madame Récamier entered into the *pique* of the singer— an infatuation, by the way, which had once obsessed Napoleon and which remained, as in Wellington's case, also unrequited. Grassini was a woman of considerable intellect, a quality which rarely distinguishes singers, whether male or

female, and her *bons mots* had considerable vogue in Paris and Milan. It is to this lady is attributed the retort made to Bonaparte, who was accusing the Italians of being natural thieves :

" *Non tutti, ma buona parte,*" replied the singer, who remembered the depredations of the young Conqueror in the art-galleries of Italy.

CHAPTER XI

RELIGION OF NAPOLEON

Modern Views of Religiosity—Newman and Manning —Men and the Atheistic View—Napoleon after the Egyptian Campaign—Real Value of Religion—The Corsican's Essential Unbelief—"An Instinct of Spiritualism"—A Sound German View—The Chevalier de Beauterne—A Napoleonic Press-Agent—The Napoleonic Expression—Man's Simian Disposition —"Christ is no Man"—Beauterne's Puerilities— Cardinal Fesch on his Nephew—Religion postulates a Calvary—Monsieur de Norvins—Napoleon's Mind too positive for Belief—His Taste for Religious Discussion—The Murder of Enghien—Napoleon's Cynical Explanation—His Choice of National Religions —His Political Horror of Atheists

ANY work which attempted to show the temperamental side of Napoleon would be incomplete if it did not include some account of his attitude towards spiritual matters. All the more so, perhaps, at the present time, when the psychologists of history, in their studies of great men are becoming accustomed to attribute given religious tendencies in their heroes to specific qualities of temperament and soul, rather than to a belief in God. Cardinal Newman, we are nowadays assured, was attracted towards the Church of Rome more by the artistic cravings of his nature, than by the fact that his studies in ecclesiastical doctrine had moved him to the conviction that the Anglican Church possessed no claim to represent the Christianity of the Apostolic age, as Catholics would assert. Manning, a strong presumption has it, saw the certainty of a grand political rôle in the Roman Church with the possibility of promotion to the Papacy—he obtained, indeed, *one* vote towards that honour in 1878—if only backed by the support of Great Britain, at a time when our country was strengthening her interests in Southern Europe. And if personal ambitions and considerations can be assumed to be the motives which turned men like Manning and Newman into virtual apostasy, we may not implausibly suppose that minor spirits are moved to commit their heresies because, let us say, the vestments of the Roman Church suit their particular style of beauty, or because the so-called Oxford manner is likely to

impress the female portion of Roman Catholic congregations—as we sometimes think.

The definite adoption of the atheistic view by any individual—for it is to the credit of thoughtful men that they fight hard against this final surrender of their first ideal—is easily fixed in the history of great characters, and it is clear enough that when Bonaparte returned from Egypt, he had finally given up all hope of a God.

" I have seen man in the savage state," he declared, " only to realise that he is no better than a dog." And though in the Concordat he adopted an official religion, it was not—who needs to be told ?—for any higher motive than that which inspires the apostles of neo-Christianity themselves —namely, that religion is a handy instrument of political influence, the main tendency of which is to keep the people in subjection. Partisans have, of course, adopted the view that Napoleon re-established the Catholic religion in France because of his inherent belief in that system—entircly forgetful of the fact that so positive a mind as that of the Corsican could entertain no illusions at all that men who are educated to accept the teachings of an arbitrary authority must fall far below the standard of intellectuality —and, therefore, manhood—of those whose spirit of independence is nurtured in all such ideas as are associated with the right to exercise private judgment. Even Monsieur Masson, whose capacity for original research no one is likely to deny, affects to think that Napoleon sincerely

believed in the religion which he replaced on the altars of France—a view which is wholly inconsistent with a proper understanding of the Corsican.

Even if it be conceded that at least the great soldier was a Deist, we are unlikely to find much satisfaction in this fact, considering the definitions which the Deists give of their God—an impersonal influence, a conscious force, notions not so low as Pantheism and yet not so high as Theism. Chateaubriand tells us that even in his attacks upon the Church, Napoleon showed that he possessed "an instinct of spiritualism" and that his "irritations against the Church are not of a philosophic nature, but bear the impress of a religious character." Such opinions we may take to mean that Napoleon did not overlook the educative and ethical value of a religion which Macaulay could speak of as the greatest monument of human *policy* that the world has known. And if in his last will and testament the Corsican declared himself to die in the Catholic faith, we may be certain that dynastic reasons counted for much in that somewhat belated auto-da-fé.

A German writer, Doctor Max Messer, declares that Napoleon was the first great apostle of a typically modern philosophy—namely, that of religious individualism, in which the idea of God assumes the proportions not so much of an idea as of a sentiment. Like a true temperamentalist, says the German, in effect, Napoleon had his own God, just as Schiller had his; the poet

maintaining that Christ was an historical necessity and that civilisation would not have been possible had not some philanthropic instinct in the great spirits of later antiquity enabled them to see the possibilities for human culture inherent in the life of Christ and his teachings.

"A State religion became, therefore," says Messer, "equally an historical necessity for Napoleon; and as Schiller regretted the disappearance of the ancient gods, so Napoleon felt himself forced to express, as in 1798 on the Nile, his admiration for certain qualities of the Moslem religion, and in 1811 for those of the Protestant."

In the year 1840, when Louis Napoleon was seeking to advance his pretensions to the throne of his illustrious uncle, there appeared a work which purported to show that the founder of the dynasty had based his ultimate political conceptions—the unification of all the States of Europe under one head—to a large extent on the idea that without the aid of Papalistic Christianity no system of universal government, such as Napoleon aspired to, would have been possible. The author of this brochure was a certain Chevalier de Beauterne, and if he had been an ascetic Christian Brother, he could hardly have shown a more child-like loyalty to his own Church, or a greater naïveté in setting forth the belief in its doctrines, which he ascribed to a man whose mind was of so positive a kind and method that we may be certain it accepted nothing in the way of hypothesis that did not immediately concern

itself with the practical business of his own vast career.

The object which the publication of this book had in view did not, we feel sure, deceive people in those days, and it was soon recognised to be a frank appeal, with ulterior motives, to the essential religiosity which supposedly underlies the Latin character. Belonging though it did to the class of political tricks which the French very aptly describe as *procédés connus*, or known processes, it nevertheless had a great vogue in its time, and we think small blame to those who made use of so plausible if impossible an hypothesis as the religious sentiments of Napoleon in order to further their own aims—all the more so that we fail ourselves to see how a working or enduring morality can be developed in young minds by any code which rejects the idea of a Supreme Being. The purely ethical religions have certainly not succeeded in achieving a high standard of virtue or civilisation, so far as we have studied.

All this does not, however, establish the case for the religiosity of the Corsican, and it is our conviction that his whole life provided a negation of his having regarded religion as anything but what it is—namely, an instrument of virtual obscurantism when its application is made to over-docile minds. Excessive emphasis has been laid, we think, by commentators on the fact that, as it is said, his recorded views on religion, given by Gourgaud, Montholon, Bertrand and others, all bear the impress of Napoleon's own particular

style of phrasing. The arts of simianism and psittacism are not, however, confined to the spoken language, and modern periodical literature shows us often enough that the gift of happy expression can be independent of even rudimentary scholarship. A visit to one of our law-courts, or to our churches or to the House of Commons itself, will indicate very quickly how much of the essential parrot there is left in the race, just as a superficial observation of the social climbing classes shows how near to the monkey is imitative man.

In the expressions of opinion, when in exile, which we have of Napoleon, there is a pronounced similarity of style which disconcerts as often as it convinces, and if the Corsican was the complex and many-sided character that we are taught to believe him, then those who chronicled his sayings must have been strangely fortunate in finding him so often in the same mood. If, in any case, the staccato and laconic style was Napoleon's style, we may be very certain that among so imitative a race as the French, it soon became a fashion, and accordingly we find but little grounds for attributing any particular phrase to Napoleon simply because it appears to be expressed in a style which was said to have been peculiar to him. Monsieur de Beauterne may be right in his opinion that the *fond des pensées* and the *nerf du raisonnement* are typically Napoleonic; nevertheless into more than one opinion to which the Chevalier attaches much account, we cannot but see that Beauterne has read a meaning which Napoleon

could not at all have entertained. He is alleged, for example, to have said once :

"I know men, and I declare to you that Jesus Christ is no man "—a statement which, if it was ever made by the master positivist, must be taken to mean that Christ was so pronounced a type of the mystic as to have ceased to retain the ordinary qualities and characteristics of a man. Napoleon, who, Madame de Stael assures us, was accustomed to look upon ordinary beings as "simple facts," would assuredly not have admitted that he was himself a man in the ordinary sense, and we know that even as late as 3rd December 1804, he could tell Décrès that he envied Alexander the Great the popular ignorance of an age in which the Macedonian could successfully claim to be the son of Jupiter. Nor, in this connection, must we overlook a common retort of his to Josephine when the latter accused him of infidelity : "I am not a man as other men, and ordinary laws do not apply to such a being as myself."

At all events we declare our total inability to accept a phrase which he is said to have addressed to Bertrand when the latter assured him that he could not see the divinity of Christ :

"Well," Napoleon is alleged to have said, "if you cannot see that Christ is the Son of God, then I was wrong to make you a general."

At Rivoli we cannot imagine Bonaparte pausing to think if Masséna possessed, or not, a religion; or Soult, at Austerlitz; or Ney, at the head of his

five thousand cavaliers on the slope of La Belle Alliance. Beauterne is full of puerilities of this kind, and in a later brochure based upon his book, and bearing the *imprimatur* of the See of Tournai, we are supplied with just such illustrations as are supposed to move the first communicant's mind to fervour. Thus: Bonaparte embracing the Vicar of Christ in a kind of filial rapture; or Napoleon standing on the altar of the Tuileries chapel, his sword buckled, his legs wide apart, arms folded, and not looking particularly impressive as he says to some cleric-looking person in a soutane: "Désormais nous aurons la messe ici tous les jours."

Beauterne—who was this gentleman by the way? We can find no trace of him in the biographies. May he not have been a kind of literary John Doe?—Beauterne, we repeat, was, or pretended to be, so lacking in an appreciation of the Napoleonic *réclame* as to present as conclusive the opinions of that old sinner Cardinal Fesch concerning the Christian sentiments of his illustrious nephew. Cardinal Fesch, we may believe, was hardly less a part of Napoleon's system than were his marshals, or his minister of police, or than Schulmeister. Indeed had Pius VII. been translated between 1809 and 1814, we reasonably presume that Fesch would have been imposed on the College of Cardinals as the successor of Pius. While talking about Napoleon's Christianity, the Cardinal, says Beauterne, could not control his feelings, and two great tears rolled down his

cheeks; after which Fesch goes on to tell how the young Napoleon was of so religious a turn of mind that, like Rawdon Crawley of the Heavies, he once had thoughts of taking up the Church as a profession! And, adds the prelatical ex-army contractor, Napoleon chose the day of the Assumption for his *jour de fête*—as if the great Corsican had made special arrangements for being born on the fifteenth day of August. And then the Cardinal deplores that he has lost a letter of two pages in which the youthful Bonaparte tells him of his unalterable devotion to the faith of his fathers, and how the young Corsican once expressed his ambition to go to Pondichéry to convert the natives! Quoting the naïf Beauterne we get:

"Before the battle of Marengo," said Fesch, "I met my nephew, by arrangement, who told me that if he won, he should return to France and re-establish Religion in the country. He then asked me what Cardinals he was likely to meet in Italy, and on my mentioning one or two, he told me to go on at once and tell them that he intended to re-establish Catholicism in France—but only within certain limits. As for the philosophers—his sword, he said, would deal with those gentry. He could have had permanent peace with the English had he consented to establish Protestantism in France as the national religion, but Napoleon would listen to none of England's overtures and replied that he intended to re-establish the Catholic Church in France solely because it was

the *true* religion. It was suggested to him that he should create a religion of his own, and Napoleon replied that in order to establish a new religion, it was absolutely necessary for the founder to ascend Mount Calvary."

This last statement is too obviously suggested by Talleyrand's answer, in 1801, to a Theophilanthropist cleric who complained that his new religion did not seem to make much headway.

"Monsieur," replied the ex-Bishop, "Christianity was successful in finding One who was willing to die for His faith. Perhaps if you were to die for yours, Sir, success might attend on your movement."

The Theophilanthropist's fervour did not, however, carry him to extremes of this painful nature.

Partisans have exhausted themselves, again, in seeking to point to Napoleon's pious dispositions in the face of death, forgetful that Napoleon's ambition was restricted at St Helena to the continuance of his name and the survival of his dynasty. To have died the atheist—the potential sun-worshipper he had so often declared himself to be to his intimates—would have been the destruction of all hope of his family reconquering his throne in Catholic France, and no one knew this better than himself. Nor does Monsieur de Norvins — also a pro-Bonapartist writer — impress us very much when he tells us, in that grandiloquent style which marked the Romantic age in France, that Napoleon was too penetrated with the sentiment of his own greatness not to

believe in the immortality of the Soul. It must have been writers of this type who invented such scenes as that in which Napoleon is reprcsented as addressing himself to a group of philosophic doubters among his generals, on the way to Egypt, pointing a fat hand upward, contemplating the starry firmament and saying in his high-pitched voice :

" Who made all that, gentlemen—who ? "

M. Thiers, too, when he treats us to a long discourse on the certainty that Napoleon's disposition turned him to religious ideas, appears to overlook the fact that religion of this kind, being natural religion, is no religion at all in the opinion of orthodox Christian teachers, who insist on practical virtues and take but little account of virtues which are simply the expression of a personal or natural disposition. Thiers even cites as a token of Bonaparte's religiosity the fact that he discussed willingly all subjects connected with philosophy and creeds—a token, we think ourselves, which, being positive evidence of a man's striving after a finality that is impossible, also settles the case for his essential unbelief. He is a sorry being, in any case, who is not moved by the story of philosophic or theological thought, and it would be surprising, moreover, if so political a mind as that of Bonaparte had not early seized upon the ethnical element in the importance of religion.

With all the best intentions towards religious belief, we cannot admit that its advocates prove

Napoleon to have looked upon it as anything higher than a forceful aid to government, or, as he termed it himself, a good instrument of order and tranquillity in the community. And with regard to the alleged discourses on the subject with which he is said to have killed time at St Helena and elsewhere, we are finally and firmly convinced that they are nearly all suspect and that the sentiments attributed to him there were subsequently invented by men whose interest it was to serve the cause of Louis Napoleon.

The man who sanctioned the murder of Enghien was one who had long ceased to entertain the notion that there existed a Supreme Judge of human acts; while the words with which he excused that atrocious act showed that whether he had ever believed in one or not, he already placed himself on the level of divinity. The Almighty Himself could not have explained the killing of Enghien with a fuller sense of being the supreme dispenser of life and death:

"I have shed blood," said Napoleon; "but entirely without anger, and simply because I hold that bloodshed enters of necessity into political combinations."

Milton's Satan never placed his self-sufficiency on a higher altar than this. No; the picture of Napoleon in Paradise can never satisfy us, nor any suggestion that he believed in one, even though Monsieur de Beauterne assures us that his hero's spirit is already there.

"When I took over the direction of affairs in

France," said Napoleon once at St Helena, "I had already formed my opinion as regards the importance of religion in a State, and had firmly decided to re-establish it. Nevertheless, I found myself forced to do battle with many prejudices before I could take the final decision to make Catholicism the State religion, and there were many in my Council who urged me to make France Protestant.

"'*Faisons-nous protestants*,' they said, 'and we shall thus get rid of the difficulty of the Concordat.'

"Yet by making Protestantism the national faith, I should only have split France into two camps and created endless trouble for myself and the country. Catholicism, on the contrary, assured me the support of the Pope, and in view of our fortunate military situation in Italy, I had no doubt that I could easily bend the Vatican to my will—that is to say, I should entirely control the vast influence exercised by the Chief of the Christian world! Although modern philosophers have sought to show that Catholicism is anti-democratic, and so have encouraged anti-clericalism, and even religious persecution, I am convinced that there is no religion which adapts itself so well as Catholicism to the different forms of government, or which is so favourable to a democratic or a republican State.

"It is not the religious fanatics whom we have to fear, but the atheists perverted by false teachings. There is as much difference between

the religion of Jesus Christ and the infamous religion of Gregory VII. as there is between Heaven and Hell. The teaching of Bossuet is the one we must follow, and with such a spiritual director we are not liable to go wrong. The moral of the Gospel is equality, and so is most favourable to Republican government."

CHAPTER XII

THE IMPERIAL EDUCATIONIST

Action, the Royal Quality in Man—The Necessity of Religious Training—Dislike of Precocity in Children —Geography and History essential in Early Years —Linguistic Talent no Test of Mentality—Are the Classics valuable?—"Bending the Mind to Labour" —Value of Geometrical Studies—The Age of Puberty and its Mystic Revolutions—The Imperial Catechism —Monsieur de Portalis, imperiomaniac—Napoleon and God—Some Questions and Answers—Contempt for Ordinary Intelligence—Cardinal Caprara's Rôle—Napoleon and his Opportunity—The Super-Caligula

ACTION—action! He who acts is master. Activity is the royal quality in man. Train the child to it and let its first sports be a prelude to its exercises. Graduate both so as to give the child agility and strength."

Here we may presume the real Napoleon to have spoken, when he drew up his system of education for the little King of Rome, then in his third year. His insistence on the cultivation of energy and activity runs through the whole curriculum which he thought to be most suitable for the proper rearing of every youth, and in so far provides us with a considerable insight into the soul and character of this arch-toiler among men. Like the practical being the Corsican was, he insisted, too, on the necessity of religious education as a good preparation for ethical instruction, though in this respect we may presume that he regarded such training from the point of view of the political ruler who wants to find his subjects docile and amenable to laws of order.

"Man requires a future," he said in a phrase addressed obviously to the clerics, "and whatever some may say, it is necessary to him. So then, *every* religion professing to teach the existence of God ought to be protected, and all the more so since the God of a nation arrived at maturity is no longer the God of its youth. When men were savage their God was a savage and wrathful God; when they grew humane their God became gentle. Time reveals the true God—the God who forgives."

The Emperor was no lover of precocity in children, a fact which we can easily co-ordinate with his dislike of the super-woman, or *précieuse*. Precocious wit and imagination in forward children — a quality which often pleases very foolish mothers, by the way—are not to be tolerated, in Napoleon's opinion, for "the mind that outruns the body has no solid basis: the child grows dull or remains feeble." In all education of children the first process must be to exercise the memory and the body; and as an aid to the cultivation of memory he suggested Geography and History, in which studies both the eye and the ear receive their meed of exercise. Of foreign languages—in which he was not himself especially apt—he very properly thought little as contributing to the formation of a strong or profound intellect; a view which modern educationists are showing some disposition to adopt, since the acquisition of a language must be based for the greater part on a gift of what the French well term *psittacisme* (Greek *psittakos*, a parrot), or parrotry, and we cannot disagree with Napoleon, who maintained that the gift of many tongues rarely distinguishes a man of profound learning or even real ability.

"It is the business of nurses to begin them," said Napoleon, "and of *valets de chambre* to go on with them. It may even be questioned whether the language of Virgil and Horace should enter into the plan of an education"—a view which we are sorry to hear expressed, although

we find ourselves leaning towards his blunt opinion that "the facility for acquiring languages, which so many fools admire, is at bottom little better than a brevet of incapacity and ignorance."

The great object of the teacher in the early stages of instruction—about the age of ten—should be, in Napoleon's opinion, to "bend the mind towards labour, and if the master succeeds in giving his pupil an appetite for work the future is safe." As might be expected, he placed much faith in the intellectual training to be gained by the study of Geometry, which (he held) exercises at once the judgment, the memory and the imagination by its processes and figures. Its graduated progress from what is simple to what is complicated, makes it mental food for every age and puts it within the reach of every intellect, he said. Children of all capacities, from ten to thirteen, may begin its elements, and by means of these we may sound their capacities. Like the penetrating observer of human nature that he was, the great soldier added the following profound truth which our pedagogues, present as well as past, seem foolishly inclined to overlook :—

"From thirteen to sixteen the blood is enriched and heated ; desires arise ; images wander through the brain and the thoughts begin to clothe themselves. This is the dawn of the imagination, and the moment for bridling and guiding it properly is also the moment for giving the studies of the pupil a new direction and different matter to feed upon."

Wisdom which cannot, in truth, be too strongly emphasised.

According to Napoleon, the age of puberty is that in which the poets, versifiers and artists are to be distinguished and separated from the mathematicians and the youths of practical mind —a theory which cannot fail to give unfortunate students of the classic Gepp much matter for retrospective thought.

If anything, in our view, is calculated to demonstrate the essential atheism of Napoleon, we think it is to be found in the extraordinary publication, meant for general use in French schools, issued under the Emperor's auspices, and entitled *The Imperial Catechism*. By the Organic Articles of the Concordat, it was enacted that there should be only one liturgy and one catechism for the churches of France, and in order to settle once and for all the Erastian condition of the ecclesiastical power, Napoleon set his *bureau de réclame* to the task of putting God and the Clergy in their proper place. In pursuance of this idea, he had *The Imperial Catechism* published — with the *imprimatur* of the helpless Papal Legate—and issued in 1806. It is hardly necessary to say that the object of this Catechism was to rear the rising generation in Imperial ideas and to assure the future of Napoleon's dynasty. With his customary forethought in all political adventures, the Emperor, before issuing his new book of religious instruction, had the opinion voiced, through his agent Portalis, that the large diversity in

existing catechisms was wholly detrimental to the proper spiritual formation of French children. By basing his new catechism on that of Bossuet, as to its essential religious ideas, he was able to say that it was but a second edition of the old work of the Bishop of Meaux. The book was indeed published under the saintly protection of that long-departed prelate.

Monsieur de Portalis, who was the chief Imperial agent in this matter, was not, it would seem, less unscrupulous than his master in mishandling religious teachings, or in reading them to his own purposes, and accordingly decided to execute his work in such a fashion that the new generation should have no doubts whatever as to the relative importance of Napoleon and the Almighty. A letter which he addressed to the Emperor in this connection is worth quoting; it is dated 13th February 1806 :

". . . At this moment the institutions of France may be said to have returned to their normal condition, and since Frenchmen have the happiness of living under the greatest of princes, I think that the time has come to bring to your Majesty's notice that part of the Catechism which deals with the relations of the subject to his sovereign. Before the new order of things much had been said on this matter, and teachers spoke in very vague terms of the submission which men owed to the chiefs of the State according to the words of the Gospel. It seems to me, Sire, that the time has gone for indulging in generalities of

such a nature, and it is now necessary to attach the conscience of the people to the august person of Your Majesty, whose rule and whose victories are guarantees of the safety and the prosperity of France. To recommend in a general way subjects to obey their sovereigns would not, in the present instance, be directing their obedience towards its proper end. Ordinary precepts may suffice in ordinary times, more especially when men are living in an order of things which has existed for a long time. But in these days the word sovereign is but a vague expression which each person defines according to his own lights and prejudices. I have therefore thought it necessary to inculcate new precepts with especial reference to Your Majesty's person. To do so will remove all ambiguity by fixing all hearts and minds on him who alone ought to be the object of their veneration."

Portalis did not confine his loyal solicitude to the person of the Emperor, but drew up his Catechism in such a way that its doctrines must also form an enduring appeal on behalf of Napoleon's successors on the throne. The Emperor, we are sorry—if perhaps not surprised—to hear, read this letter with great pleasure; with such obvious pleasure, indeed, that we are inclined to suspect that Portalis had been commanded to address it according to the terms stated. In the original catechism of Bossuet that prelate had written but a small paragraph which emphasised the subject's obligation of obedience to the sovereign, and the sovereign in those days had been Louis XIV.

Napoleon was not so easily satisfied, however. Obedience to the authorities had by 1806 become the corner-stone of the new Imperial fabric, and here is what we find in the new book of religious instruction :

Question : Is submission to the Government of France a dogma of the Church ?

Answer : Yes. The Gospel teaches that he who disobeys the State disobeys God. The Church imposes upon us very especial obligations towards the Government of France, which protects religion and the Church. It commands us to love it, to cherish it and to be ready to make all possible sacrifices for its service.

This particular passage the official theologians objected to, on the ground that it could not be reconciled with the claim of the Catholic or Universal Church to be the impartial mother of all nations. The Emperor agreed, but was, nevertheless, insistent that his name should count for something in the Catechism, and accordingly a new dogma was interpolated after the following extraordinary fashion :—

Question : What are the duties of Christians towards the princes who rule them, and, in particular, what are our obligations to Napoleon I., our Emperor ?

Answer : Christians owe to the princes under whom they live, and we owe in particular to our Emperor, Napoleon I., love, respect, obedience, loyalty, MILITARY SERVICE, the taxes necessary for the defence of the Empire and his throne,

and fervent and frequent prayers for his prosperity and happiness and that of the State.

Question: Why are we bound to fulfil all these obligations towards our Emperor?

Answer: In the first place, because God, who creates empires and distributes them according to His will, by endowing our Emperor with genius, whether for Peace or War, has given him to us for our Sovereign Lord, and has appointed him the instrument of His power upon Earth. Therefore when we honour and serve our Emperor, we are also honouring and serving God Himself. In the second place, because our Lord Jesus Christ, by His precept and example, has taught us what we owe to our sovereign. *He* was born in the time of Augustus and obeyed the laws of Augustus; He paid the required tax; He ordered us to give to God what belongs to God and to give to Cæsar what belongs to Cæsar.

Question: Are there not some very special reasons which must strongly attach us to Napoleon I., our Emperor?

Answer: Yes, because he is the man whom God has raised up in difficult circumstances in order to re-establish the national Faith of our fathers, and to be its protector. He has brought back public order by his profound wisdom and energy; he defends the State with his mighty arm; he has become the anointed of the Lord through the consecration which he has received from the Sovereign Pontiff, the chief of the Universal Church.

Question: What are we to think of those who fail in their duties towards our Emperor?

Answer: According to St Paul, the Apostle, such people would be capable of resisting God Himself and His established order, and are deserving of eternal damnation.

Question: The obligations which we owe to our Emperor, do they not likewise bind us towards his legitimate successors according to the established Constitution of the Empire?

Answer: Most certainly they do; for we read in the Scripture that God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, by an act of His supreme will, and by virtue of His fore-knowledge, grants kingdoms not only to one person in particular, but also to that person's family.

Question: What is our duty towards our magistrates?

Answer: We must honour, respect and obey them, and this because they are the depositaries of the authority of our Emperor.

Question: What other obligation are we bound to observe towards our rulers?

Answer: We are forbidden to disobey them, to do them harm, or to speak badly about them.

The indefatigable Portalis did not allow his imperiomania to stop here. In a further letter addressed to Napoleon, he suggests that many reforms could be effected in the ritual, in the police regulations and bye-laws governing burials,

marriages, the celebration of feasts, the performance of sacramental rites—all of which, he says, are somewhat behind the times and fail of accordance with our new ways.

It would serve little purpose to discuss the question whether the Cardinal-Legate, Caprara, then the agent of the Vatican in Paris, was, as has been asserted, a venal spirit wholly under the influence of the Corsican, and equally as atheistic as Napoleon himself, as was said. The Catechism, it is certain, honoured neither those who drew it up, nor the sovereign who allowed it to be published, and remains a lasting monument to Napoleon's contempt for the intelligence of commoner mankind.

In a few weeks after the publication of this Catechism, with the Legate's *imprimatur*, the Emperor purchased a palace at Bologna from Caprara and paid the prelate's very heavy debts. This in addition to having appointed him Archbishop of Milan, thus drawing the Cardinal within the sphere of the intimate influence of the King of Italy, as the Corsican had also become. Napoleon was the last man in the world to neglect an advantage, and in making the extravagant claims which were advanced in the Imperial Catechism, fully realised, we may suppose, that his pretensions, being not less arrogant than those which the Church frequently claimed for the Vicars of Christ, could hardly be rejected by a Pope who virtually bespoke the politico-spiritual supremacy of the world. And accordingly we are not surprised

to learn that the majority of the French Bishops —practically a band of Gallicans *malgré eux*— appended the *sigillum* of their approval to an apotheosis which must have moved even Caligula himself to mirth and mockery.

CHAPTER XIII

NAPOLEON AND JOURNALISM

The Press after Brumaire—Difference between French and English Journalism—Wholesale Suppression of Sheets—Liberty of the Press ceases—Newspaper Morality—Napoleon's Journalistic Précis—Monsieur Fiévée, Chief Censor—Le Moniteur becomes Official Organ—Napoleon's Private Paper—Value of Official Organs—Government's Duty to the Nation—Lucus a non Lucendo—A Newspaper without News—Monsieur Suard, Editor—Le Journal des Débats—Napoleon and Fractious Editors—Le Mercuré de France—Monsieur de Chateaubriand—Napoleon's own Press Agency—Beugnot and the Emperor—Les Idéologues—La Route d'Antibes—The Adaptable Sub-Editor—The Hundred Days—Napoleon's Opinion of the Press—Caustic Remarks on Journalists and Writers—His Earliest Venture as a Newspaper-Owner—The Courrier de l'Armée—Napoleon's Personal Corps of Special Correspondents

THE great day of Brumaire, by making Bonaparte master of the destinies of France, put a term to whatever liberty the Press had up till then enjoyed. Many conditions combined to play into the hands of the new Dictator in respect of all matters connected with popular liberties, and not the least of these was the national weariness which looked, with perhaps an excusable enough resentment, on all movements which were likely to protract the general unrest attending upon the aftermath of the Revolution. The difference between French journalism and English journalism, then as now, has always lain in the fact that the former possesses a greater literary quality, and that therefore the personal equation counts for a larger force in French newspapers. Accordingly the fine work of the *idéologue* superabounded in the critical Press of Paris, and this was altogether opposed to Bonaparte's manner of considering the functions of a public institution.

Shortly after the establishment of the Consulate, accordingly, Bonaparte, of his own initiative, issued the famous edict of 17th January 1800, suppressing all sheets in Paris which possessed a political bearing, with the exception of thirteen. The principal among the survivors were the *Moniteur*, the *Journal des Débats*, the *Journal de Paris*, the *Gazette de France*. This drastic enactment also went into operation in the Departments. Until that date there had been seventy-two political papers in Paris and about three times

Photograph: Anderson

PAULINE BONAPARTE AS VENUS VICTRIX

By Canova

that number in the provinces. The *Constitution* of February, 1800, made next to no mention of the liberty of the Press, and, as we have said, patriots and philosophers were too wearied by the factious conditions of the Revolutionary decades to care much about the fate of an institution which, for all its potential might, neither politics nor society had ever taken *au grand sérieux*. The lot of the dispossessed journalists excited, therefore, not the least concern, and it is recorded by Félix Rocquain that the general public saw with not a little *Schadenfreude* the removal to obscurity of a class of individuals who were notorious lovers of the limelight.

In April of this first Consular year, Bonaparte instructed Fouché to supply him with a report concerning the character and disposition of the various editors left in charge of the surviving thirteen sheets. It was urged that their morality should be beyond any suspicion of being corruptible—their political morality, obviously. A special department was established in the Administration, the object of which was to keep watch upon the newspaper offices, and it is interesting to note that this censorship was entrusted to prominent military men. The First Consul was daily supplied—Baron Fain has told us much anent this—with a précis of all that the newspapers were talking about, in much the same way as an important Minister is supplied by his personal secretary with a tabular digest of the morning's mail. The zeal of Fouché was

consequently not less under observation than the editors upon whom he was charged to report, an important consideration for Bonaparte, since his minister of police—an ex-Christian Brother—was supposed to represent the old Jacobin or extreme Revolutionary faction. And so, in order effectively to watch the watchman, the Consul appointed Fiévée, formerly editor of the *Gazette de France*, his private adviser on all journalistic matters. Fiévée, it may be observed, remains best known to us by an aphorism which he is said to have fathered: "Politics, even in representative governments, is what we do not talk about."[1] Ordinary newspaper readers received only a part of the truth from their sheets; but Bonaparte received the whole truth from Fiévée, and accordingly knew what, and what not, to suppress. Madame de Genlis and that Barère, on whom Macaulay lavished much of his high-class journalese, were also paid spies who reported on the editors.

The *Moniteur* became the official organ of the Consular political establishment, although a *Bulletin de Paris* was also established as an official sheet of the First Consul, the articles of which were written in his own cabinet, under his eyes, and often at his dictation. Despite this high patronage, however, the *Bulletin* had no circulation, and Fiévée, an expert journalist, explained the reason of this to Bonaparte.

[1] We quote this aphorism simply, and without professing to see either its wit or its wisdom.

"Official organs," he said, "are not worth the paper they are written on, and they are not a month old before everyone knows who edits them, as well as for whom and for what cause they are published. Intelligent Frenchmen will consequently not read them, more especially those who are looking for political guidance. They are read mainly by such as are anxious to know just what the Government thinks, and once readers find that official editors are seeking to form their political views, they revolt and go into direct opposition."

Fiévée goes on to point out that so long as governments fail to disclose their programmes frankly to the nation, a wholesome and educative type of journalism is not possible, and then addresses himself to the moral taught by British journalism.

"Nothing," he says, "is easier than for the English writer to choose his side, for nothing fundamental is ever in discussion in that country, and all men know there what are the issues in dispute. But what is not in dispute in poor France? We are supposed to be a Republic, which is not true; we speak of liberty, yet have no liberty; it is said that the Revolution has ended, when another is really about to start. No man tells the First Consul what he really thinks. Does the First Consul tell anyone what *he* thinks? All this militates against a proper presentment of public and governmental opinion."

In pursuance of his policy of reducing the Press

to the least possible significance as an institutional factor in the life of France, Bonaparte adopted a system of withholding from all but the official organs the various bulletins and police notices and reports which constituted, as "*nouvelles et faits divers*"—town talk and life's little incidents—almost the only resource of the dailies of that time. And the iron finality of his determination to discourage anything like individual enterprise on the part of a newspaper may be divined from the following extraordinary commandment, writ rubric in the office tablets :—

"Whenever any news unfavourable to the Government becomes the subject of rumour, it must not be published until it is found by verification that it is already known to everybody."

There was short shrift, as may be imagined, for all who failed in their observance of the new Press regulations. The *Democratic Republican* of Auch complains of the high prices of cereals at a time when Lucien Bonaparte and his brother Joseph were attempting to effect a corner in the grain market. Lucien was then Minister of the Interior and gives his instructions as follows :—

"It is of the first consequence to destroy immediately so dangerous an instrument in the hands of agitators. I order you, therefore, to suppress this paper without any consideration whatsoever of loss or hurt to either editor or shareholders, and to arrest anyone who dares to show any sign of opposition to the authorities."

Even ordinary literary criticism became a

perilous pitfall for outspoken writers who thought that their functions did not stop at æsthetic discussions about style and art. The *Ami des Lois* was suppressed because a facetious reporter indulged his humour by making sarcastic remarks about the appearance and attitudes of a certain "meeting of men who honour the Republic"; and even the Academy was to be treated as if its deliberations were as necessary to the lives of mankind as the Immortals invariably thought them.

One of the papers which had been authorised on the establishment of the Consulate was the *Publiciste*, whose editor Suard was a friend of Madame de Stael. This publication refused to print the official apology for the murder of the Duc d'Enghien, and in the letter in which Suard took up his stand of honourable opposition to Bonaparte, he wrote, in effect:

"I am now sixty years of age and, my character not having weakened with the years, I mean to finish my career as I have run it. The *coup d'état* to which you ask me to subscribe I regard as an act of violence to all my notions of equity and political justice. My second objection is to the interference with properly constituted legal authorities in the trial of the Duc d'Enghien, a summary act which puts the personal safety of all citizens at the mercy of arbitrary officials. I decline, therefore, to write against my convictions."

The paper was given a new editor who received one-sixth of the revenue of the sheet as salary, the Government taking another one-sixth, the

remaining two-thirds going to Suard and the syndicate. The *Journal des Débats* managed, by a policy of tactful "trimming," as the Americans put it, to build up a prosperous circulation, during the Empire, its net revenue amounting to £8000 a year. This publication nevertheless voiced its abhorrence of the crime of Vincennes.

When the Empire was established in 1804, Napoleon in his supplementary Constitution, known as the *Senatus-Consultum*, devoted a few clauses to a mention of the "liberty of the Press," seven Senators being appointed to safeguard the integrity of the new privileges granted to the Fourth Estate. For all this, the French Press of the new régime possessed no broader liberties than that of the Consulate, and Napoleon could still continue as of old to talk of "my Press." From the farther ends of Europe his letters to Fouché regarding the newspapers followed swiftly upon each other, and the minister of police was often urged to make his editors talk as they were told to talk, or else try some other line of commerce.

"Je les réduirai à sept," Napoleon threatened, "et je conserverai, non ceux qui me loueront—je n'ai pas besoin de leurs éloges—mais ceux qui auront la touche mâle et le cœur français et qui montreront un veritable attachement pour moi et mon peuple."

A distinguished contemporary tells us in one of his works that he knows of a famous American

newspaper proprietor who is accustomed to speak of his writers as *prostitutes*. Evidently Napoleon's opinion of a race of but poorly appreciated and inadequately rewarded workers was on much the same plane, for in his letters to Otranto we find such expressions as :

"Let X, the editor, know that I intend to settle *his* account."

Or : "birds of evil augury, how comes it that they only prophesy calamities so far ahead ? "

Or : "it is a bit too much of a farce to have a Press which has the disadvantage of freedom without any of its advantages."

Or : "all articles, little as well as big, must be *good* articles "—meaning Imperial—"and I am not the man to allow journalists to draw high profits from papers that do me nothing but harm."

In October, 1805, the Emperor forced the *Journal des Débats* to change its title to *Journal de l'Empire*, and annexed £3300 of its net revenue of £8000, with the unexpected result, for Napoleon, that the circulation of the paper increased by half.

The famous *Mercure de France* and the *Publiciste* also become the objects of Napoleon's anger :

"Monsieur le duc d'Otrante," he writes, "I have read an article in the *Publiciste* which appears to be a frank write-up for the Spanish monks. Give the editor to understand that he runs the risk of having his paper suppressed. Let him insert articles which depict the ferocity of

these monks, their ignorance and their ineffable *bêtise.*"

It was in the *Mercure* that appeared some of the first fragments of Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme.* The author, who had thrown up a diplomatic secretaryship, it will be remembered, as a protest against the murder of Enghien, made no attempt to disguise his opinion that a reincarnation of Nero had taken place, but that Tacitus having also come back to earth, the reign of the tyrant could not be for long. Napoleon's answer was the appointment of Legouvé as censor of the *Mercure*, and Guizot remarks hereanent :

" Even Napoleon could not allow it to be said that his future historian would appear during his reign, and so had to take the reputation of Nero under his protection."

The new Tacitus was, of course, Chateaubriand.

In 1809 the Emperor gave orders that from that time onward, only *one* newspaper in each department should be allowed to deal with *political* matters. The prefect would, of course, decide as to the choice of the organ. By 1811 there were only four authorised papers in Paris —the *Moniteur*, the *Journal de l'Empire*, the *Gazette de France* and the *Journal de Paris.* The *Mercure* and the *Publiciste* had been summarily suppressed. By a decree dated from Compiègne, 17th September 1811, all existing newspapers were confiscated as being really the property of the Government, the entire plant of the *Débats* (*Journal de l'Empire*) being taken over, and the

syndicate reorganised to the drastic extent that even the proprietors were not included among the new shareholders. Neither were they indemnified. From that time till 1814, the Press was simply the voice of the Master.

Need the modern world then be surprised to hear, in our own age of personal *réclame*, that Napoleon, over a century ago, had founded his own personal press agency known as the *bureau de l'esprit public*, or agency for promoting public opinion. Was not Cæsar's *Acta Diurna*—a kind of daily record—supposed to be a bit of frank press-agency work compiled on behalf of the authorities? Napoleon's bureau sought to propagate among the authorised newspapers all and everything in the way of ideas that the Emperor thought necessary for the support of his throne, and was an obvious attempt at just such organised obscurantism as Berlin has made us so familiar with during the Great War of 1914.

In another place we have shown how Madame de Stael came under the ban of Imperial policies because that illustrious woman had dared to raise her voice in the cause of human liberty. "It is to ideology," cried the Emperor, "and to all such *ténébreuse métaphysique* that France has owed all her misfortunes." Beugnot suggests that there are certain periods when it is necessary that ideas should be expressed.

"I understand you," roars the irate Emperor; "yes, that is just one of the mottoes of your school."

"I have no other school," replies the courtly Beugnot, "but the school of the Emperor."

"That is only a phrase—nothing more! You are of the same school of *idéologues* as Roederer, Regnault and my brother Louis and Fontanes. No, I forgot—Fontanes belongs to another school of idiots. But," and Napoleon touches the hilt of his sword, "so long as this hangs at my side, you shall know none of those liberties after which your soul aspires—not even, Monsieur Beugnot, the liberty of giving those pretty little addresses of yours in Parliament."

Chateaubriand's famous pamphlet, *Bonaparte et les Bourbons*, appeared when the Royalists were moving all they could to effect a compromise between the Imperial and their own factions, and was, on account of its violence and hatred of Napoleon, a source of much annoyance to those who were seeking to bring all parties to an understanding. In a certain degree it may be said to have laid the lines of the long intrigue which was to bring back Bonaparte from Elba, since its tone provided the inspiration for the scores of revived sheets which leaped into light and forced the authorities to be hardly less intolerant of the newspapers than Bonaparte had been in his time. "In the interests of public tranquillity," declared Fouché, "we must muzzle these hydrophobes of the Fourth Estate." And the soundest minds in France favoured the exercise of the censorship at that critical hour.

The manner in which the newspapers of the day

reported the triumphant advance of Napoleon, after his landing at Antibes, on the return from Elba, has often been cited as providing a very succinct commentary on the weakness of ordinary human nature in the presence of the wonderful. The successive newspaper bulletins read :

First day : The Corsican tyrant has landed at the Gulf of Juan.

Second day : Grenoble has opened its gates to the bloody usurper.

Third day : Bonaparte has made his entry into Lyons.

Fourth day : General Bonaparte has won over a division of the Royal Army.

Fifth day : Napoleon is now only ninety miles from Paris.

Sixth day : The Emperor Napoleon arrived last night at Fontainebleau.

Seventh day : His Majesty the Emperor entered the Tuileries at half-past eight last evening.

For all the doubts that have been cast on Napoleon's sincerity in respect of his concessions to journalism, on his return from Elba, some writers of the day appear to think that his meditations on his own downfall, while in exile, had led him to the conclusion that, with the Press on his side, he might have secured his throne during the first reign. It is certain that on his return from Elba the newspapers enjoyed a freedom of expression which they had never before known. To Benjamin Constant Napoleon said :

" The liberty of the Press is above all an

essential in wise government. To seek to suppress it is absurd—of that I am convinced."

In opening the Chambers he declared again that the liberty of the Press was a capital consideration in the new programme for France, with which he had returned from Elba, and even when certain journals began to advocate the assassination of their well-wisher, Napoleon took no action to limit their candour. The *Journal Universel* at Ghent drew a pretty parallel between Cain and the Corsican—much to the latter's disadvantage; yet no move was made to oppose its appearance twice a week.

Napoleon himself declared at St Helena that the newspapers counted for nothing in his fall. The Press, he said, was one of those institutions which need not be discussed as to the good or evil which they do in a nation. The main concern of governments is this: can public opinion be opposed in curtailing the liberties of the Press? His own experience, he admitted, had taught him that to curtail those liberties had been a blunder, and accordingly, when he returned from Elba, it was with the firm intention of allowing newspapers to say what they liked.

It seems fairly clear, then, that Napoleon was no friend of the Press in the earlier days of his triumphant progress, and it must be admitted that his treatment of that institution lessens to a great extent the opinion we have been taught to entertain about his marvellous prevision in political and diplomatic matters. Even Joseph and Louis

Bonaparte, who were perhaps the least endowed as politicians of this wonderful family, had solemnly warned him betimes that the already-powerful newspaper world was one which would brook neither mishandling nor indifference on his part, only to receive the famous reply:

"You fools attach far too much importance to the society and opinion of journalists and literary men. That class of individuals is made up of just so many coquettes whom it may be wise to play with, but whom we should never dream of making either our wives or our ministers."

The soldier, as a rule—and the truth has been very fully impressed upon us in these later times—is ever jealous of the writer, and from his very first debuts as a general, Bonaparte had been made to feel that there was one force which all the militarism in the world was powerless to muzzle or coerce. Even while in Italy, during his first important campaign, he had founded a journal which lasted for two years and was known as the *Courrier de l'Armée d'Italie.* In this publication was at various times forecast the vast programme which Napoleon subsequently carried out for his own aggrandisement and that of France, and a perusal of its first numbers leaves one with the impression that Bonaparte had brought it into existence more with a view to showing the Directory that, with his advent, their supreme power had finally departed, than with any hope of affecting public opinion to a very important extent. "To defend liberty and its friends against

the partisans of tyranny and terror" was the chief aim of its founders, as it stated in the first issue. The *Courrier* made its appearance twice a week when first started, but its main object once achieved—namely, the warnings addressed to the Directory—the publication became somewhat irregular.

Napoleon, as M. de Narbonne informs us, had special correspondents in nearly every country in Europe, and certainly in all the important centres of France and Italy, who transmitted to himself all sorts of information regarding the state of public opinion, the tendencies, intrigues and intentions of publicists, *salons*, clerics and speculators. M. de Villemain also tells us how on one occasion the Emperor, towards the close of his reign, addressed himself to an audience at the Tuileries with especial reference to the "vulgar outspokenness" of certain sections of the Press which were already growing bold enough to preach ideas about "the beginning of the end," and in such a way, Napoleon said, as to make him blush for the nation. This was in 1813, when the end was unmistakably in sight.

CHAPTER XIV

BONAPARTE VERSUS DE STAEL

Bonaparte attracts de Stael—Bonaparte's Natural Antipathy for Corinne—Augereau and Madame—Chez M. de Talleyrand—Constant and Corinne—Benjamin's Little Inadvertence—De Stael and her Spokesman—Intrigues against Bonaparte—High Political Ambitions—Une Femme incomprise—Her Work on Literature—Constant is dismissed—De Stael's Comment—Bernadotte and Corinne—Delphine appears—Bonaparte's Comments—A Pen-Portrait of Corinne—Madame at Weimar, in Vienna and Stockholm—Corinne's Regard for England—Her Son Augustus—Some Fatherly Advice—Projected Visit to America—De l'Allemagne—A Machine à Mouvement—Napoleon disgusted with her Views—Goethe and de Stael's Work on Germany—The Visit to Russia—"The Conscience of Europe"—Stein and de Stael—Her Essay on Suicide—Goes to London—Byron's Opinion of Corinne—Death in 1817—Gourgaud and Madame—Napoleon's Impartial Opinion of her Qualities

ALTHOUGH Madame de Stael had not met Bonaparte until his arrival in Paris, 5th December 1797, at the close of the Italian campaign, she had begun to correspond with him shortly after the young soldier had proved his supreme military quality by winning the battle of Lodi. Even her early letters to Bonaparte overflowed with an enthusiasm which reflects little credit on the womanly taste of the châtelaine of Coppet, and if it be true that great artists are too self-centred to care very much about the proprieties, then Madame de Stael was certainly a first-class type of the artistic race. In the earliest of these effusions addressed to the soldier at Milan, the lady attributes to him all the virtues of "Scipio and Tancred combined, possessing the simplicity of the latter and the brilliancy of the former." In a third epistle to the celebrity whom she had not yet met, she shows how far her enthusiasm is capable of carrying her. Bonaparte was in those days, it was well known, still very much in love with Josephine, and we may imagine his surprise on hearing from de Stael that his union with "an insignificant little creole, unworthy and incapable of appreciating him, is nothing short of monstrous."

"That creature is mad, Bourrienne," cries Bonaparte to the secretary, who records the fact in his *Mémoires*, vol. vi., "and I shall certainly not reply to such letters. Fancy a blue-stocking, a maker of romances, comparing herself with Josephine!"

Even the uncouth soldier Augereau is said to have taken the measure of the lady, who pestered him with questions as to Bonaparte's love of Liberty, his ideals and his personality. Discussing his ambition, she asks if it is true that he has an eye on the crown of Lombardy, and Augereau's reply evokes a titter at the garrulous woman's expense: "No, indeed," he says, "he is much too well bred a young man to entertain such notions."

When at last she meets Bonaparte, who was calling on Talleyrand, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, the young General, after a kindly word about her father, turns away quickly, as if he feared an impromptu harangue. She on her part begins to *épier* the Conqueror, but remains silent and apparently troubled. In the immediate sequel, all de Stael's attempts to attach the young General—she was some three years his senior—to her own coterie were to meet with failure, and he refuses politely but firmly to attend even her receptions—a refusal which is explained by biographers of both celebrities on the ground, first, that he disliked—as most really masculine men dislike—anything like the affectation of *esprit fort* on the part of a woman, a type with which recent hermaphroditic decades have made ourselves so familiar. In the second place, Bonaparte was well aware that a partisan of de Stael's political activity was quite capable of compromising him with the Directory, whose suspicion as regards himself, and his intentions, he was far from wishing, at that time, to arouse.

It was at a fête given by Talleyrand—according to Lucien Bonaparte, on the great revolutionary day of Brumaire—that Bonaparte, the centre of a circle of admirers, was asked by de Stael to name the greatest woman known to history.

"The woman who has had the most children," replies the General with admirable wisdom and in a taste which accorded sufficiently well, we may suppose, with the ambiguous society of the new régime. A few days afterwards, again, when the persistent *précieuse* chooses a dramatic moment to ask him if he likes women, Bonaparte replies that he loves his wife—a retort the real value of which altogether loses its effect in the English rendering. Madame de Stael did not miss the point, however, and, in order probably to cover her chagrin, affected to see its sublimity:

"Epaminondas would have given me the same answer," she tells Lucien, who was a very close ally, and who records Madame's opinion hereanent in the second volume of his *Mémoires*. By the beginning of 1799 de Stael had to admit that she had never met a man of Bonaparte's kind or character, and in January of that year she decides to return to Switzerland, there to set about some work or other which is, she thinks, to prove unfailingly to Bonaparte her possession of a genius for politics with which France shall have to reckon. She returned to Paris and was present, as we have seen, on the day of the overthrow of the Directory. Her devotion to the cause of Bonaparte, enthusiastically expressed in all her

letters, arose, says Gautier, from her inability to see that the successful General of the Revolution was now playing for his own hand—a mistake which Sièyes, Benjamin Constant, Roederer and many other ardent Republicans also made.

Benjamin Constant entered so intimately into the life of de Stael that it is impossible to separate the couple. We cannot, accordingly, overlook a story of Constant, told by Aimé-Martin and Chabaud, when de Stael sought to use her influence for the promotion of her fellow-countryman and lover. As the *Tribunat* was about to be organised, Constant presented himself *chez* Bonaparte and requested a seat in the new Assembly.

"You must know," said Benjamin, "that I am entirely devoted to your service, and am not one of those *idéologues* who want to run the world on theories—like Sièyes, for instance. Mine is a positive, an objective mind, and if you appoint me, you can rely altogether on my loyalty."

The new Constitution had not yet been drawn up, and it occurred to Constant, on leaving Bonaparte, that as Sièyes lived nearly opposite the General, it might be just as well to pay a friendly visit to the ex-Abbé, who received him cordially.

"I should be glad," said Constant to his host, "to be appointed to the *Tribunat*, and hope not to seem unworthy of that honour in your eyes. You know I hate force and am no friend of the sword. What I want is principles, ideals, justice, and if you will help me, you can rely altogether

on my loyalty, for, let me assure you, I frankly detest Bonaparte."

Constant had strangely overlooked the important fact that Chabaud, who had been present when he met Bonaparte across the road, had also in the meantime come over to pay a diplomatic visit to Sièyes, and remained unobserved while Benjamin made his new act of political faith to the Abbé.

Constant was, however, ultimately appointed to the *Tribunat*, and Madame de Stael and her lover at once came to the conclusion that Bonaparte had nominated him through fear of the influence exerted by her writings and *salon*. Accordingly de Stael thought the moment opportune to start her intrigues for ridding the Government of Bonaparte and inaugurating a régime of republican liberty—a condition of affairs which was not likely for long to escape the observation of the new chief of the State. Bonaparte sends his brother Joseph to reason with the *intriguante*, offering even to repay her father's loans to Louis XVI.—a sum amounting, with the interest for over fourteen years, to about £150,000. But Corinne is not thinking of money. What she wants is an acknowledgment by Bonaparte that her political rôle is not a negligible one, and her answer is given in a speech delivered by Constant and inspired by herself, which amounts to an attack on the Consular régime and its monarchical tendencies. Bonaparte replies by letting loose the furies of his own Press and inspiring to the

limit of invective the Press of the Royalists and also that of the Jacobins. These all abhorred Madame de Stael with an intensity the causes of which may be sought in the outrageous persistency with which she clamorously sought the attention of an age which was but slightly acquainted with the political female. Even this Press campaign she turns to her policy of personal *réclame* and assumes the rôle of persecuted woman, assuring Roederer, among a score of correspondents, that no woman has ever suffered as she has suffered—a common delusion of unwomanly and dishonest women. A short time afterwards she receives unequivocal orders to go into residence at Saint-Ouen, where she has a château, a foretaste of complete exile which to some extent saves her rather homely face, for, acting under orders, the Talleyrands, the Bonapartes, the Beauharnais and other families had long since ceased to visit her *salon* in Paris.

When at the instance of friends, the interdict is raised and she returns to Paris, it is not, as might be hoped, to efface herself and devote the tedious hours to literary work. She moves every influence she knows with the object of being admitted to the presence of Bonaparte. He curtly suggests that Madame de Stael, who lives in great luxury, should make a small allowance to her husband, at that time starving in Switzerland. Nor does the First Consul improve matters by making cynical remarks on the private life of Corinne, who, it will be remembered, was at all times all things to all men—or nearly so. In

1800 she published her work, *De la Littérature*, in which, while the name of the First Consul is not once mentioned, the fierce attacks upon his policies are clear as sunlight. Naturally, he was irritated, but prudence forbade him showing his anger, for even at that date, as Chateaubriand tells us, his newly acquired power was far from possessing the stability one would imagine from a study of historical records. The battle of Marengo had not yet consolidated him in his omnipotency, and although his subsidised Press said all he thought—and, indeed, more—of Corinne's new work, Bonaparte himself took no action against the enemy. He waited till 1802, when he eliminated a score or so of red Republicans from the *Tribunat*, among them being de Stael's own mouthpiece, Benjamin Constant, through whom, in her serious opinion, she was destined to place herself on level political terms with Bonaparte. So much for political womankind!

"*Le Premier Consul*," she declared, on hearing of this despotic act, "*n'a pas épuré, mais écrêmé le Tribunat*," and went on to talk of Bonaparte as an "*idéophobe*."

"That sentiment is Madame de Stael's, certainly," says the elegant Corsican, when told of her *mot*. "I could smell her a mile away. *Idéophobe*, does she say? Why not hydrophobe? *Ah ça*—but who could govern with people like that about!"

And Talleyrand—*son ancien*, her cast-off—is

given instructions to tell Madame to place a sentinel over her *big* mouth. There is no possible question of a reconciliation between this strange couple after the enactments of the Concordat and the Life-Consulship, both of which clearly show to what lengths Bonaparte is prepared to go, and de Stael, Constant and the old Republican patriots finally realise how cleverly they had been tricked by the simple student-conqueror who returned from Italy in 1797 with the Treaty of Campo Formio in his satchel. It is now beyond doubt established that de Stael counted for an important equation in the conspiracy in which Bernadotte engaged before the passing of the Concordat. Corinne charged the future King of Sweden with hesitancy if not cowardice :

"Hurry up," she wrote, "you have only a short time in which to act. To-morrow the tyrant will have forty thousand priests in his service."

The appearance of *Delphine* about this time was another blow at the system of Bonaparte, whose ambition had early divined its great opportunity in the wholesale restoration of order which it was in his power to effect within the community. And on no established social institution had he calculated to this end more than upon the marriage contract, which he rightly looked upon as the keystone of national life—the surest guarantee of order within the State. *Delphine* had a vast success on its

appearance; it is frankly the story of a *femme incomprise*, a type of woman who, it seems to us, is never sure of what she wants—when it is not a man—and whose life seems to be one long pilgrimage spent in a vain quest of the male ideal —indeed, a kind of *devancière* of those polyandrous females with whom Georges Sand has made us so familiar.

"Very false, immoral and altogether anti-social," cries Bonaparte, who in commenting on its special pleadings for easy divorce, delivers himself of some elegant remarks about the private life of Madame. Nor did he fail to inspire the scribes of his subsidised Press. The critic of the *Mercure de France* speaks of women of the type of *Delphine*, who, it need hardly be said, represents Madame de Stael herself, in the following strain:—

"Such creatures are simply animals in their lustfulness and their passions, and it is much harder to be their friends than their lovers. . . . Look at them, and you will find that they are invariably great, fat, gross, full-blooded women who, externally at least, give no indication of the soul-tortures which they affect to undergo"—all of which bears the impress of the Corsican's style and method of invective.

When exiled in 1803, Madame betakes herself to Germany and at Weimar meets Goethe and Wieland, the former of whom introduces his friend Schlegel, and this worthy man undertakes to form the lady's ideas as regards his country, its institutions and inhabitants. Schlegel even

accompanies his pupil to Vienna, to Stockholm, to Petersburg, and acts in the capacity of secretary and press-agent, with the especial duty of giving to all the capitals which they visit a true picture of the tyrant of the Tuileries. While she is in Germany, the establishment of the Empire takes place, and de Stael sets about a new campaign, the object of which is to detach the old French nobility from the service of Napoleon, an attempt in which she is only partially successful, since great families like that of La Rochefoucauld, of Rémusat, of Montmorency, of Turenne and Ségur have shown no objection whatever to join the Corsican's establishment, and all the more so because the astute upstart places a premium on their ability to show his own ennobled parvenus how to play the complete courtier.

Napoleon, whose Cabinet Noir is ever on the alert, intercepts every letter written by his enemy and there is consequently no detail of her intrigues with which he is not acquainted. Madame does not even suspect the Emperor's espionage and is stirred "almost to convulsions" when on requesting permission to reside near Paris, she is ordered to remove nearer to the frontier. Nor does the appearance of *Corinne* improve the relations of the twain: Napoleon accuses her of being frankly anti-French and correspondingly Anglophile, for *Corinne* is one long pæan of the English character and all its peculiar virtues, which spring, she maintains, from such free political institutions as enable them to flourish.

And to the accusation that she has deliberately depreciated the French character, de Stael replies that she only represents the "*abaissement des caractères dans l'état social*"—which the Corsican's despotism has deliberately brought about.

In 1808 Napoleon indicated in very clear terms his reasons for treating Madame de Stael as a public enemy and for keeping her in exile. All her Paris friends having failed of inducing the Emperor to allow the lady to reside in the Capital, her son, Augustus, a schoolboy of seventeen, decided himself to seek an interview with Napoleon and endeavour to move his pity. The Emperor was on his way back from Italy and young de Stael, knowing that he would pass through Chambéry, awaited his coming in that city. On being told the object of the boy's visit, Napoleon, one is pleased and, indeed, not surprised to hear, consents to see him while he is breakfasting at a hotel, and grants the youth an audience of nearly an hour. The Emperor does not, he himself says, consider Madame de Stael a bad woman, but only a woman who will not submit to authority, and he must insist on being obeyed. She could not curb her tongue, and though she may not attach much importance to what she says, Napoleon does, since he knows for how much she counts in public opinion.

"I have to take things very seriously," he tells the boy, "and if I were to allow your mother to return to Paris, within six months I should have to imprison her. I should be sorry to have to do

so, since I must suffer for it in the opinion of the public. . . . As for you, *jeune homme*, stick to the right path in politics, for I shall not easily forgive a Necker. Paris, you must see, is my home, and there I can tolerate only those who respect me. If I allowed your mother to come to Paris, she would very soon lose me all my friends. Rome, Naples, Vienna, Berlin, Milan, even London—all these cities are open to her. She has only to choose."

After that, and as she found herself more closely watched at Coppet, there was nothing for it but America, and at one time she seriously thought of going there. An American newspaper, hearing of the likelihood of the great Corinne visiting "these shores," comments thereon in characteristic superlatives:

"She is a tremendously wealthy woman and lives in extremely splendid and decorous style at her very elegant mansion. The famous woman has also written several books which, having a large circulation in Europe, undoubtedly bring her in *good money*."

"The savages!" cries Madame de Stael when she reads this exquisite Press notice.

All literary Europe knew by this time that her work on Germany, to which she had given six years' close labour, was already in the hands of the printers; and the critics, not less than the connoisseurs and politicians, were all on the alert for its appearance. Ten thousand copies had already been struck off by the publisher when

Napoleon gave orders to Savary—then Minister of Police—to suppress the whole issue. Her son preserved the manuscript, however, and the work was eventually published in London by John Murray, in 1813.

"I am sending you," Napoleon wrote to Savary, "the work of Madame de Stael. Has she the right to describe herself as a Baroness? Did she adopt this title in previous works? Suppress the passage relating to the Duke of Brunswick, and three-fourths of what she has to say in praise of England. She has done us enough harm in this respect."

Even now de Stael, with that never-failing self-delusion which marks her relations with Napoleon, solicits permission in an eloquent letter to the Emperor to be allowed to reside in Paris:

"Why should I blush," she cries, "to ask for friendship, poetry, music, painting and all that ideal existence which I can enjoy without refusing obedience to the sovereign of France?"

Napoleon is said to have been touched by this appeal, but was true to his conviction that Madame de Stael was too much a *machine à mouvement* to be trusted in such susceptible political *salons* as those of Paris.

Constant, in his *Memoirs*, tells us how Napoleon, after reading a certain passage in *De l'Allemagne*, threw the work on the fire and gave orders that Madame was to be more strictly watched than ever. There is little doubt that the Emperor suppressed the book on general principles, as

they say, and without having made any especial study of the ideas it set forth. Nor can it be doubted that he not only directed but even stimulated the zeal of those to whom he had assigned the task of spying on de Stael and her movements. This work, it may be observed, was an unequivocal appeal to the Germanic nations to throw off the yoke which had oppressed them since 1806, to organise their resources, to learn the lessons that England and the Peninsula were then teaching to the enslaved Continent, and to be prepared against the hour which was at hand when the awakening peoples would turn and rend their oppressor. Even Goethe, in February, 1814 —when his friend Napoleon was obviously on the eve of his first collapse—could write to his correspondent, Madame von Grotthus: "The French police, intelligent enough to realise that a work like *De l'Allemagne* must have the effect of building up the confidence of the Germans in themselves, prudently suppressed it. Even at this very hour it is producing an astonishing effect." It is not difficult, therefore, to understand why Napoleon refused to allow this modern female Tacitus to place her new *De Moribus* before a Germany which was only awaiting an auspicious moment to raise the banners of reasoned—and honourable —revolt.

In 1812 Madame de Stael made her memorable visit to Russia, and was already in Moscow when the Napoleonic armies were advancing on Smolensk. The great society of the old capital

failed to understand Madame, although they were willing to do her reverence, first, as the enemy of Napoleon, and, secondly, as the great representative of the "conscience of Europe." Even semi-barbaric Muscovy found Corinne heavy of form and unpleasing of face—"too big for a woman and built like a man," as Arndt put it. Nor did they think her style of dress becoming in a woman already approaching her fiftieth year; "her discourses are too long and her sleeves too short," said a sententious member of the Rostopchin family, who also describes the amusing way in which our elephantine Egeria and Baron Stein used to *caramboler* together on the sofa when discussing the iniquities of the latter-day Nero. From Moscow de Stael proceeds to Stockholm, where she finds her old friend Bernadotte already Crown Prince of Sweden and quite as cordially disposed towards her as in the early days of the First Consulate.

Here she resumes her literary activities and an avalanche of pamphlets is the result, in which Bernadotte is extolled as Europe's only hope against Napoleon. Schlegel's essay on Napoleon's Continental system appears about the same time, and Napoleon, not less than the connoisseurs, is perfectly well aware that Madame de Stael is the inspiration behind this attack on himself and his system. Even in her short *Essay on Suicide* she finds it impossible to avoid giving expression to her political views, and accordingly assails the sort of egoism that allows no enthusiasm to live which

Photograph: W. A. Mansell & Co.

MADAME DE STAEL

1804

After the painting by Godefroy

finds its source in ideas of liberty and independence. She attacks the type of Christianity which, bending before the tyrant, remains satisfied with its own slavery, and finally deplores the "fashion of suicide," almost vulgarised since Werther, throughout Germany, and points out that *death in battle against despotism* is a far worthier way of quitting life. And not satisfied with working herself against the enemy, she induces her bridegroom husband, Rocca, to write his experiences of the French campaign in Spain—a frank exposition of Napoleon's inhuman methods when carrying war into hostile countries. Monsieur de Rochechouart tells us, too, that until Madame de Stael had suggested its possibility to him, Bernadotte had never conceived the idea of succeeding Napoleon as Emperor of the French.

In London, where she resided on leaving Sweden, all society rushed to her *salon*, and among the many historic names on her visiting list, we note that of Byron, then in his twenty-fifth year, who quickly wearied of the voluble lady and declared that if her books were in *octavo* style, her eloquence was certainly in *folio*. Murray published her book, *De l'Allemagne*, in 1813, and the result of the battle of Leipzig proved to Englishmen that they were entertaining a prophetess, for she had foretold Napoleon's collapse when Germany's national conscience should awaken. On 8th May 1814, while Napoleon is making his way to Elba, de Stael returned to Paris, in broken health, and not unmoved at the fate of the Corsican, whom, for

all her opposition, she never ceased to look upon as the only hero of the modern world. Napoleon, indeed, on his return from Elba recognised that she had been kinder to him in his misfortune than she had ever proved during his prosperity, and in the hope of attaching her to his new constitutional ideas, expressed his desire for an understanding, admitting that she had made him more enemies during her exile than she could have done had he allowed her to remain in France. It is also said that Napoleon gave her to understand that her old claim on the French Treasury should be settled, and in the *Memorial,* chapter iii., Madame de Stael is represented as addressing a letter to the Emperor, conceived in the most fulsome terms, in which in consideration of receiving her millions, she offers to devote her pen and her principles *for ever* to Napoleon—a charge which may, we think, be dismissed, as well as Gourgaud's statement to the same effect. Says this very naïf aide-de-camp, who might well, indeed, have posed for the picture of the imperishable *Brigadier Gérard,* in volume ii. of his *Memoirs* :

" She gave me to understand that if *I* could induce the Treasury to pay over her millions, she would write anything *I* wanted." And then airily : " *Je l'envoyai promener*—*I* sent her about her business."

On the second return of Louis XVIII. Madame de Stael played a more important rôle in Court and general society than she had done even

during the first restoration—a fact which seems to give the lie to the charge that she had been willing to sell herself to Napoleon. At St Helena, in 1817, the death of this great woman moved the tactless Gourgaud to remind the fallen Emperor that her world rôle had been epitomised in the description of Europe's great Entente between 1805 and 1815 as "Britain, Russia and Madame de Stael."

"She was a woman," said Napoleon, with real justice, "of very great powers of mind."

CHAPTER XV

BIOGI—CHATEAUBRIAND—STENDHAL

An Unstoried Celebrity—Biogi and Bonaparte—Philosopher and Artist—Biogi and the Military Art—The Corsican's Affection for him—Poisons and Antidotes—The Battle-field of Rivoli—Berthier and Bonaparte—Biogi dislikes Army Men—Bonaparte as Connoisseur—Gros and the Arcola Picture—Biogi's Description of the Corsican—M. de Chateaubriand—The Vicomte and the First Consul—A Mutual Antipathy—Le Génie du Christianisme—Essentially anti-Catholic—Chateaubriand's Egotism—The Little Man and the Big Quarry—The Vicomte is dismissed—His Colossal Vanity—His Obsession as to Napoleon—Some Expressions of Opinion—"Napoleon and Myself"—Beyle, alias Stendhal—His Literary Pedigree—The Individualistic Touch—His Connection with Napoleon—Stendhal's Idolatry—His Impartiality—France and the Empire—Napoleon's Dead-heads—Stendhal and the ex-Empress Eugénie—An Author's Discretion—Stendhal, Megalomaniac—Napoleon's Trust in him—An Imperial Present—The "Soul" of the Imperial Army—Stupid Officialdom—Napoleon, France's Greatest Man—His Best Achievement—"The Great Emperor"—A Change of Temper—A Literary Man's Philosophy—Napoleon diminishes—A Final Recantation—"Napoleon was our only Religion"

WHAT the painter Biogi achieved as an artist we are unfortunately unable to say, since our researches, in many biographical dictionaries of his own and later times, tell us nothing either of his professional status or even of his ever having passed across the crowded stage of the Napoleonic drama. To Stendhal we owe it that this young landscape painter, a Frenchman by birth and an Italian by origin, has been rescued from complete oblivion and given an honourable place in the annals of the Corsican. The picture drawn by Stendhal of Biogi's association with the soldier is, in our opinion, one of the most pleasing we have met with in our quest for details concerning the art-circle of Napoleon, and the youthful artist's independence of mind and character in his attitude towards the Conqueror, as well as towards the temptations which the latter so persistently held out to him for his personal advancement, must be admitted to be singular, as shown by a member of a brotherhood which is not remarkable for its indifference either to the spectacular life, or to its possibilities.

It was during the operations on the Mincio, in the early Italian campaign, that Bonaparte and Biogi met for the first time. The successful soldier, already surrounded by a crowd of sycophants and intriguing self-seekers, was at once attracted towards his youthful countryman by the strange trait of philosophic indifference with which the latter watched, unmoved and detached, the imposing drama even at that period beginning

to unfold itself round the figure of the Corsican. Biogi's work had, moreover, the advantage of making an especial appeal to the as yet uncorrupted taste of the triumphant warrior—namely, in that it was untouched by what Napoleon himself termed the *gasconisme* common to artists of the time, whose tendency was to exaggerate the actual beauty and effect of all the scenes and portraits which they committed to canvas. Failing to induce the artist to throw in his lot with him as a military man, and although he had added a promise to look carefully after his promotion, Bonaparte sought to attach Biogi permanently to his suite in the capacity of official painter. To both offers the young Frenchman answered very candidly :

" General, I am far from blaming men who adopt the military profession which, in its own way, may doubtless be both noble and useful. To me, however, it makes no sympathetic appeal, and I am of those who look upon it as a coarse and inhuman trade which never fails to show men in their worst aspects. Not all the glory of all the conquerors that ever lived could induce me to devote myself to a military career."

To the offer that Biogi should become the official pictorial chronicler of the brilliant Italian campaign, which Bonaparte made to him on the morrow of Rivoli, the painter replied :

" Sir, on entering on my profession I took the resolve never to allow myself to work except under such inspirations as came directly from my

own heart and mind, and I feel that the battle-field is the least likely of all scenes to move my brush to endeavour into which I can throw either my heart or my mind."

Biogi, it appears, was hardly less attracted towards Napoleon than the latter to himself. He it was who once counselled the young General to undergo a kind of regular régime with a view to preparing his constitution against the possibility of being poisoned, by taking antidotes and so preserving his life for the benefit of the Republic. Berthier, says Stendhal, on this occasion made a sign to the young artist suggesting that Bonaparte did not care for that kind of conversation. To the surprise of the Chief of Staff, however, Napoleon took up the subject and treated his table company to the philosophy he held in regard to this matter.

"There are poisons, doubtless," said the young Corsican, according to Stendhal, "but is there a remedy against them? If Medicine were a real and an exact science, would it not, in the case of sickness, recommend repose as the best thing for one? But can there be any repose for a man of my character and disposition? Suppose, for example, I was to forget my duty so far as to hand over the command of the army to one of my generals, and go to Milan or Nice, I should be entirely unable, at that distance from my troops, to judge of the real effects of one or more battles. My blood would in that case be in far worse condition than if I remained here where I could deal

directly with the actual situation. No; a general in supreme command must take all the risks attached to his position, which in their way are not dissimilar from the risks that are imposed on the commonest grenadier. Besides, if I lost my self-respect, I should have lost everything, and death itself would be far preferable to reaching that stage."

It was after this somewhat vague discourse that Bonaparte sought again to move the young artist to paint the battle-field of Rivoli. Biogi again objected and insisted that his forte lay in landscape work. The Corsican would not be denied, however, and finally Biogi—who in order to facilitate his work was provided with an escort by Berthier—consented to paint the scene of one of Bonaparte's earliest masterpieces of the art of war. In regard to Berthier, Biogi tells that he appeared to act as nothing more than Bonaparte's chief clerk, that he was never consulted but always given orders, and that this, in the majority of cases, was the Corsican's attitude towards his subordinates even at that early stage in his career. For his own part, the young artist declared that, Bonaparte and the common soldiery excepted, he had no liking at all for the officers, high or low, of the Army of Italy.

"I was surprised," Biogi is reported by Stendhal as saying, "at the distant attitude of the General commanding towards even his most distinguished lieutenants. To have exchanged a word with him was sufficient to make the conversation of a mess-

table for a whole evening. So you may imagine with what envy I was regarded by other men. But I suppose," he adds wisely, "the General would have entirely changed his disposition towards me once I had put on the uniform he wished me to wear."

Biogi was not singular among the connoisseurs in thinking rather meanly of Napoleon's knowledge of art matters.

"The General-in-Chief had good enough instincts," he admits, "but had no training whatsoever in regard to technique or the various schools. He used, for instance, to confuse the works of Hannibal Carracci with those of Michel-Angelo."

At that date, we learn with interest, Gros was executing his noted picture of Bonaparte rushing across the bridge of Arcola with a regimental flag in hand. Of this painter Biogi said:

"Gros is the only artist who has courage enough to reproduce the *pauvretés*—an artist's expression—which in those days characterised the young Conqueror who had the appearance of a man already far gone in consumption. Only Bonaparte's superhuman physical activity showed at that period the iron constitution of the soldier. His glance had in it something astonishing: it was at once fixed and penetrating, but possessed nothing whatever of poetic or lofty inspiration. His look changed to one of great tenderness whenever he spoke to a woman, or whenever they recounted to him some heroic action on the part

of a soldier of his Army. On the whole, he was a being apart from all other men. None of his generals in any way bore the least resemblance to him. Lemarrois had a charming face, was kindly, and excellent company; distinguished though he was, however, he always looked like an inferior being beside his general-in-chief. Murat looked splendid on horseback, but there was an inherent coarseness in his beauty. Duphot looked the man of intellect. Lannes, alone, at times reminded one of the mighty Corsican.

"Bonaparte was ever the object of a profound and almost devotional respect; he was a man without peer, and everyone who entered his presence felt this at once. The women of Verona almost fought to get a sight of him at the palace of the Venetian Ambassador—a very impressive individual, this functionary, who, for all his pompous figure, looked like a schoolboy in the presence of young Bonaparte."

* * *

Chateaubriand, it will be remembered, was acting as secretary at the Legation in Rome in 1803, a position which the First Consul had given him shortly after the appearance of *Atala*, a work which had—very deservedly, we think—won for its author an immediate renown. Bonaparte's object in conferring office upon this representative of the *vieille roche* was a twofold one, inasmuch as the soldier assured himself at once possession

of the talents of a first-class writer, as well as of the services of a member of the order which alone was able to perform the duties about a Court, as he himself declared. Accordingly Chateaubriand, when his new-found fame had made him an object of flattering attention in Paris, received his invitation to the Tuileries and was presented to the master. Evidently the distinguished pair were very much disappointed in each other, as Talleyrand might have put it, for a kind of metallic antipathy—if one may use such an expression—rendered their first rencontre anything but a cordial one, and apparently the twain declared war at sight. Thereafter the author went to Consular Court but rarely, and on only one of these occasions was distinguished by a word from the forbidding Corsican, who, with the object possibly of removing an unpleasing person from Paris, sent Chateaubriand to Rome. The writer, then in poor circumstances, readily acquiesced in a promotion which guaranteed him sufficient means of indulging the only sporting taste he possessed—namely, the pursuit of Love.

The Vicomte, it would seem, was one of the many very vain spirits of that age who affected to see in the overwhelming glory of Napoleon a force which rivalled and precluded any possible fame for themselves ! From the first day of their meeting, says Maurice Dreyfous, the author of the *Génie du Christianisme* pretended that Bonaparte was jealous of his success ; and to the very end,

adds the same authority, Chateaubriand was obsessed with the idea that posterity would consider himself and the Corsican as co-rivals in renown! The religious element in France of that time—Catholic, where not Rationalist, of course—had set great store by the work we have just mentioned, though for what reason we ourselves fail to see, since the central idea of the *Génie* tended to show that Catholicity made its appeal almost wholly to the sensual instinct in its adherents—that is to say, that the Roman Church depended for its religious and proselytising triumphs in the main on the essentially artistic methods with which it clothed its ritual, and on the sentimentalism with which it inspired its teachings—a point of view which no person of intelligence can fail to observe on perusing that very much overrated production. *Atala*, no competent judge will be found to deny, was a genuine masterpiece, and, had he written nothing else, Chateaubriand might have rightly based his claim to the recognition of posterity on the merits of that work alone. But to say that he imagined, as Dreyfous asserts he did, that "his fame entitled him to consider Napoleon an obstruction in the way of his claims," is to overlook altogether the fact that Chateaubriand belonged to a clique of *idéologues* who perfectly appreciated all the kudos that was to be derived from attacking so high-placed and successful a personage as Napoleon—a *procédé connu*, as we remember to have said in another case, which has never in

any age escaped the watchfulness of the little man in search of the big opportunity.

While acting as Secretary at the Legation in Rome, his social importance gained him the acquaintance of several persons who belonged to the circle of correspondents of Madame de Stael—at that time engaged, as we have seen, in intrigues the object of which was the defeat of the First Consul's plans for establishing the Empire. As easily susceptible to feminine influence, as Bonaparte was indifferent to and unassailable by it, Chateaubriand entered eagerly into the conspiracy which sought to thwart Bonapartian interests throughout Italy. Napoleon's emissaries were not long in discovering the political dispositions of the author-secretary at the Legation, and accordingly the Vicomte soon became a marked man. Realising that he was watched by Fouché's spies, he took advantage of Napoleon's fateful blunder in executing the Duc d'Enghien, 20th March 1804, and sent in his resignation, which, it would seem, had only anticipated his own dismissal by some hours. After a few years' travel he returned to Paris, where he founded the still-surviving *Mercure* in 1806—a publication which proved itself a source far more of irritation than of fear to the Emperor, who, we feel very certain, had no illusions whatever as to the quality of the patriotism which moved this hyper-emotional artist to oppose his methods of governing France.

In the famous posthumous *Memoirs* there is

to be found a very comprehensive series of the Vicomte's expressions of opinion about the great Napoleon, and the close student will not fail to note Chateaubriand's total inability to consider the Corsican as apart from himself and his affected anti-Napoleonism, or rather his anti-Napoleon propaganda; for Chateaubriand opposed Napoleon far more than he opposed his policy, as indeed also did Madame de Stael, Constant and a host of others of the great self-advertising circle of opposition, as Napoleon must have fully realised. In truth, had the Emperor condescended to receive into his intimate entourage those opponents of himself who achieved both fame and capital from their affected hostility to him, there would not have been found, we feel convinced, a single individual in the long list of his enemies who would not have sold himself body and soul to the master of Continental Europe. Here are a few of the published statements which indicate very clearly Chateaubriand's obsession regarding what he considered to be his rivalry with Napoleon:

"He made the world tremble—but never *me*."

"He saw kings in awe of him—but not *me*."

"My *Génie du Christianisme* had *acted* on Napoleon. . . ."

"The murder of the Duc d'Enghien changed *my* life. It also changed Napoleon's."

"Napoleon may have done away with Kings. He has not done away with *me*."

On one occasion he hears that the Emperor—too great not to be a fair-minded man when valid

argument was advanced against him—has uttered a favourable view of certain opinions expressed in *De Bonaparte et les Bourbons*; whereupon Chateaubriand writes:

"Napoleon would make no peace with Kings; he sought, however, to make peace with *me*." [1]

And again: "We were both sons of the sea—Napoleon and myself, and I have entered into his spirit far more intimately than those who have lived at his side"—a claim which certainly did not die with the Napoleonic era.

* * *

If anyone were to impose on us the task of tracing the literary descent of Henri Beyle, *alias* Stendhal, we should have no difficulty whatever in ascribing his intellectual origin to the declaration of Luther. And we should argue that the revolt which rent the system of reasoned—and in some degree philanthropic—obscurantism followed by the Church of Rome, and introduced the notion of self-sufficing Protestantism, inevitably brought in its train a school of philosophic partisans who made their direct appeal to the spiritual or intellectual pride of men. The scientific rationalism of the Encyclopædists was one of the first effects of the great Lutheran cause in France; the revival of Letters in Germany, which eventually reached its height with Goethe—and finally degenerated into Nietzschism—was

[1] *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe.*

another of the great movements towards enlightenment which were, in the main, a revolt against clericalism and clerical influences; Rousseau, Voltaire, Goethe, Byron—these were the greater spirits that inspired writers like Stendhal, and later the apostle of the Superman, and having in mind the lengths to which, in its modern development, especially in Germany, ultra-individualistic theories have carried the world, we cannot but uncover before the prophetic spirit of Napoleon, who said of Rousseau that history would show whether it had not been better for mankind if such a man had never existed.

Stendhal owed his association with the Corsican to the fact that he was connected with the family of Daru, an able servant of Napoleon, who procured him an official position in the financial department of the government under the Empire. He had been present as a member of the commissarial suite at the battle of Marengo at the age of seventeen, and enlisted subsequently in a dragoon regiment, rather, as he admits himself, because of his ambition to be able afterwards to say that he had served in the legions of the Emperor, than from any love of a military career. Beyle, who subsequently adopted the *nom de guerre* of Stendhal, assuming ultimately, as Cam Hobhouse tells us with some suggestion of ridicule, the title of Comte de Stendhal, was in his earliest manhood a fervent admirer of Napoleon and all that the Corsican stood for. So fervent an admirer, indeed, of the mighty conqueror's

method of imposing himself and his ideas upon the world, that the heroes of the two works which keep Stendhal's memory alive are made, on setting out upon their worldly careers, to adopt a philosophy of life which is based wholly on an absence either of moral scruple or of altruistic sentiment. Even in 1837, at the age of fifty-four, when a man's emotions, we presume, are governed by his self-criticism, Stendhal could write of the idol of his earlier days that only one man had up till then won his entire respect, and that man—Napoleon.

What Stendhal has to say concerning the disposition of the people towards Napoleon and his new-founded Empire in 1804 is of considerable interest, in view of the claims of the Bonapartist faction that the new Emperor was acclaimed throughout France with an absolute unanimity. According to his version, Napoleon's popularity with the masses remained very much in question until after the battle of Austerlitz. Up till the banishment of Moreau in 1804, the victor of Hohenlinden, he says, easily disputed the affections of the people of France with the Corsican, and it was the consciousness of this fact which had moved Bonaparte to exile his great soldier rival. Even after the official announcement—18th May 1804—that the First Consul was to assume the Imperial title, a large section of the people of Paris was unfavourable to Bonaparte's ambition. On 12th July of the same year, Stendhal tells, the Emperor-elect attended one of the first

representations of *Les Bardes*, of which work we have spoken elsewhere. A full house at the Opera meant, he goes on, receipts amounting as a rule to 12,000 francs. That evening, although the theatre was completely filled, the management took only 6000 francs at the box offices, which went to prove (says Stendhal) that Bonaparte himself had "bought" the house. He was received with great acclamation on this occasion, be it noted. On the day following, the Emperor visited the Comédie Française, where *Iphigenia* was being staged, and his presence passed entirely unnoticed. Stendhal is also authority for the statement that even on his coronation day few were found to acclaim the Emperor and Empress with any cordiality as they passed through the streets of their capital. All of which goes, we think, to show that Stendhal's impartiality was quite independent of his admiration for the Corsican.

His direct relations with Napoleon began in 1807, some months after the entry of the Emperor into Berlin as a result of Jena, and Stendhal wrote a description of that event thirty years later to a young Spanish lady, then but a child, a Señorita Eugenie Guzman y Palafox, whom the present world knows as the ex-Empress of the French. We are given very little information, however, as to the nature of his labours with Napoleon—so little, indeed, that his enemies often declared the co-operation of the soldier and the author to have been a fantasy of the latter's bright imagination. Stendhal himself declared that his silence

on the point arose from his resolve not to compromise himself by telling all he might have told. There is no doubt, however, that Napoleon entrusted him once with the duty of levying a five-million war indemnity on Brunswick, and the author-financier proved his good will towards the Imperial patron by raising seven millions. He claimed also—perhaps with the facile mendaciousness of the megalomaniac who has once entered the presence—to have participated in the negotiations which led to the alliance between Napoleon and the Archduchess Marie Louise. Extant documents make, however, no mention of his name in this important connection. Nevertheless his name is on the list of accepted courtiers, and like the first-class temperamentalist he is, Stendhal omits no opportunity of informing us of the fact: he is presented to Marie Louise by the Duchesse de Montebello and is a constant attendant at the Imperial receptions. Napoleon charged him, during the tragic retreat from Moscow, with the provisioning of several army corps, and entrusted him, about the same time, with a sum of three million roubles (£300,000) for "a particular service." The nature of this service Stendhal does not state, though we think ourselves that the money was probably to be conveyed to Madame Walewska—in those days Napoleon's most trusted friend and the mother of two sons by him—as a provision against the difficult times which, we correctly suppose, the mathematical mind of the Corsican then very clearly foresaw.

Stendhal gives us, from his own intimate experience, an account of the "soul" of the Napoleonic military system which we do not remember to have read elsewhere, and which can hardly fail to prove interesting in these days of martial gest. As one who had served in the Grand Army, who had powerful connections, and who might well have aspired to high promotion, Stendhal, nevertheless, confessed himself entirely disgusted with the "intimate souls" (*intérieurs d'âmes*) of the military men he had met with and whom he describes as "dull-witted sword-trailers." No man saw more of Imperial officialdom than himself, and no man was more sensible of the "insolence and essential dependency and stupidity of Napoleon's servants"—the real agents of the fall of the Empire, as he declared. Nevertheless, he holds, Napoleon is the greatest man whom France has produced, and a tithe of the glory the Corsican achieved will suffice, he is certain, to discount whatever of iniquity his system disclosed. The imperishable glory of the Napoleonic legend is, he writes, the enduring heritage of the people of France who, as a result of the Imperial wars, have learned that a personal *cachet* has impressed itself for all time on the very name of Frenchman. And if a patriotic unity in the face of hostile nations has discovered itself in France, it is Napoleon's achievement which has called it forth. He upbraids the Emperor for his weakness on the days succeeding Waterloo, when he should (says

Stendhal) have declared himself Dictator. For all his senseless ambition, however, posterity will tell for all time the tale of the great Emperor, and his enemies will succeed in interweaving their names in his august legend solely because they had been his enemies.

But, alas for Stendhal's emotionalism. With the vaingloriousness so common to the artistic literary man, Stendhal declares in 1816: "*I* fell with Napoleon," and goes on to show that the condition of his private fortune justifies him in revising his somewhat ecstatic devotion for the fallen Corsican. *Primo panem, deinde philosophari* is a sound literary man's motto, and towards the end of the year 1817 Stendhal, forced to a realisation of its truth, begins to contemplate Napoleon from the point of view of a Bourbonist in search of office. Under this venal analysis Napoleon shrivels to the proportions of a rather ordinary greatness: It was the littleness of his contemporaries which really contributed to the glory of Napoleon. Had other countries had their Hannibals and their Scipios and their Cæsars, things would have gone far differently. He was a badly educated man, was Napoleon—Stendhal now thinks; he really was ever an aristocrat at heart and his founding of the Legion of Honour should have proved to France the real character of the hero of 1800. Above all, Napoleon feared the priests—a characteristic born of his elementally Latin nature. Even as a politician he showed little

talent when the support of the sword was wanting, and honest investigation showed that the Corsican had destroyed the sentiment of liberty in France. The explanation of all of which becomes clearer when we discover that a few months after penning the above opinions, Stendhal seeks to show that his loyalty to the Bourbons had never faltered during the "absence" of Louis XVIII. between March and June, 1815.

The final recantation was to come, as we might indeed expect from so emotional a character; and Stendhal touched a deeper truth than he himself probably suspected when he contributed his final explanation of the Corsican and his hypnotic influence on that heroic age, in the sentence:

"Napoleon was our only religion."

CHAPTER XVI

IMPERIAL OFFICIAL THEATRE

One of Napoleon's Chief Ambitions—Instructions to Champagny—Authors and their Rights—Assurance of Remuneration—Where Napoleon failed—Imperial Art mediocre—Limitations of Patronage—Genius discovers itself—Always its own Patron—Imperial Epoch unfavourable to Art—Some Liberal Awards—Tragedy, not Comedy—The Théâtre-Français—Decree of Moscow—Napoleon a Real Benefactor—Schools of Dramatic Art—His Liberality to the Histrions—The Dresden Bill—His Practical Patronage—His Friends among the Illuminati—Did he like Artists?—Remarks by Rémusat—After Marengo—A Line from Cinna—The Murder of Enghien

HENRY LECOMTE, in his *Napoléon et le Monde Dramatique*, relates how the Emperor once declared to Champagny that one of his chief ambitions as a sovereign was to be able to reward the composer of a really great tragedy.

"You, Champagny," said the Corsican, "are head of the literary establishment of the Empire. Literature needs encouragement, and I charge you with the duty of finding out and suggesting to me all possible ways and means of discovering a literary genius who shall do honour to my reign."

With this object in mind, he made it one of the first cares of his régime to take under his especial protection the rights of authors and composers in regard to their literary and musical works.

"If such a thing as property really exists," said the Emperor, "it must surely lie in the ideas and inventions issuing from the brain of artists and literary men. For what property can be more personal or more intimate?"

Accordingly, it was decreed that every dramatic or operatic work should be subsidised from official appropriations—apart from royalties arising from representation—for every separate occasion on which it was staged, the minimum official award being £12 a night for every staging for the first twenty nights, and £8 up to the fortieth, when an especial bonus of, at the lowest, £20, was paid to the author. If any particular piece did not, of its enacting, occupy a normal evening on the

stage, and if supplementa in the way of ballet or concert were found to be necessary, a reduction of about one-third was effected on the author's official reward, the bonus after the fortieth night remaining, however, in all cases. The authors were thus positively assured of receiving a substantial enough remuneration for their intellectual labours, and were furthermore protected against unscrupulous theatrical managers. All these promulgations dated from 1802.

For all his willing encouragement, however, Napoleon cannot be said to have nearly approached the success attending on the official patronage of Louis XIV. or Louis XV., and Laugier, a French writer, voices the opinion of the majority of the *connaisseurs*, we think, when he declares that the French drama during the Empire, like all the other Arts of the same period, was entirely lacking in anything like a superior cachet. Great men, he says, with truth, may found great institutions, but they cannot endow others with the genius that Nature has withheld ; objective or interested inspiration invariably ceases at the threshold of the atelier or the study, and all the prodigality of Napoleon towards those artistic spirits whom he thought likely, through their productions, to add resplendency to the glory of his reign resulted only in a very obvious mediocrity. Supreme artistic ability discovers itself, as a rule, long before the patronage which venally seeks to exploit it, and Napoleon's good will and inspiration were no more equal to the forcing of a mind like that of Corneille

than they were capable of creating a Rembrandt or a Murillo. And so the most glorious reign in the long history of France was unable to show one single masterpiece for its existence.

The French writer goes on to account for this failure on other grounds : a vast society had, he says, to be reconstructed from the ruins of the Revolution, and the generation which had engaged in one long Homeric conflict with Europe in arms was unlikely to father an era of supreme artists, a race of beings who are born of peace rather than of war. Again, ambitious men of the age sought the fruition of their aspirations in the Imperial armies, in the Imperial judiciary, in the State's councils, and the fine arts attracted only minds of second-class rating—an inevitable result of all militaristic autocracies, as Confederated Germany has, we think, more than proved in our own time.

In 1804 Napoleon officially announced prizes of 10,000 and 5000 francs respectively for a tragedy and a comedy, the excellence of which should satisfy an official Imperial jury appointed to make the awards. Raynouard was successful in obtaining the prize of 10,000 francs for his tragedy, *Les Templiers*, while the award for comedy was not made, the reason given for withholding this burse being that although the comedies showed sufficient talent, the Emperor wished above all things to encourage Tragedy—in the vain hope, we easily divine, of unearthing some Corneille who should add lustre to the name

of Napoleon and his Age. Despite the fact that the official jury advised the encouragement of Comedy, on the ground that the comic playwrights were much farther behind Molière than the tragedians were behind Racine and Voltaire, the supreme authority at the Tuileries declined to alter his decision, and so Comedy went unrewarded and unencouraged.

The famous Imperial Decree that gave to the Théâtre-Français the perfect organisation which governs that institution to this day, was dictated from Moscow, 16th October 1812. This act of Napoleon, says Laugier, in effect, is one of the imperishable and constructive benefits with which the great Emperor endowed modern France, to the rebuilding and permanent moulding of which he so largely contributed. By an earlier decree of January, 1803, he had given the French Theatre its commercial or practical organisation. The Decree of Moscow definitely, and probably for all time, fixed its administrative constitution. And, adds Laugier, if the Imperial epoch was poor in dramatic literature produced during the reign, it is equally certain that it has never been excelled in respect of the technical art of the official exponents of the French Theatre. What execution! What perfection in the interpretation of our immortal masterpieces! Moreover, it is to the lasting merit of Napoleon that while he assembled the greatest galaxy of dramatic actors and actresses that France has yet known, he also provided for future generations by founding schools of dramatic

art which now form part and parcel of Europe's most artistic nation.

On the occasion of the journey to Erfurt, Napoleon distributed some £1500 among the half-dozen actors who went thither with him. When a similar excursion was made to Dresden by the Comédie Française, in 1813, a much larger sum was expended in rewarding the artists for their services. Monsieur Laugier gives the items in connection with that visit, as follows :—

Desprez . .	6,000 frs.	Barbier . .	3,000 frs.
Saint-Prix .	6,000 ,,	Mlle Thénard .	4,000 ,,
Talma . .	8,000 ,,	Mlle Contat .	6,000 ,,
Mlle George .	8,000 ,,	Mlle Mézeray .	4,000 ,,
Fleury . .	10,000 ,,	Mlle Mars .	10,000 ,,
Saint-Fal . .	6,000 ,,	Mlle Bourgoin .	6,000 ,,
Michot . .	4,000 ,,	M. Maignien .	2,000 ,,
Baptiste . .	6,000 ,,	Brothers Fréchot	1,500 ,,
Armand . .	6,000 ,,	Colson . .	500 ,,
Thénard . .	4,000 ,,	Combre . .	500 ,,
Vigny . .	6,000 ,,	Bouillon . .	500 ,,
Michelot . .	4,000 ,,	Mongellas .	500 ,,

The Emperor insisted on his family and the high functionaries of the State maintaining their *loges* at the first theatre in his capital. For his own box he paid 21,000 francs, or £840; Queen Hortense, his step-daughter, paid £145 for hers; Berthier, £340; Talleyrand, £360; King Joseph, £420; Prince Lucien, £310; Madame Récamier, £280; Bernadotte, £150.

According to Monsieur Lecomte, the Emperor was accustomed to receive his favourite artists at

Photograph: Anderson

DAEDALUS AND ICARUS
By Canova

the Tuileries during first-breakfast, or about nine o'clock, this hour corresponding—in his case, as a working sovereign—to the *lévée* of the old French monarchs. Rarely did this meal exceed fifteen minutes in duration, though when exceptionally interesting visitors presented themselves, Napoleon would graciously surrender his precious time to *illuminati* like Monge, Bertholet, Costaz, Denon, Corvisart, David, Gérard, Isabey, Talma, Fontaine and others, saying, as was his custom :

" Gentlemen, my cabinet is closed for the time being. Let us talk."

And the Emperor invariably talked more than anyone else.

Lecomte affects to believe that the Corsican entertained sentiments of good will for the artistic brotherhood, a point of view which we have dealt with elsewhere, and disproved, we think. Once, according to this authority, he accused Monsieur de Luçay, an eminent official of his palace, with having slighted some of the actors who had business with him.

" Do you know," he is alleged to have told the forbidding Luçay, " a talent, no matter what its nature, is a veritable power in the world, and I make a point, myself, of never omitting to salute Talma when I meet him."

Monsieur de Rémusat, who is responsible for this detail, takes care to add that Napoleon, in making the remark, meant not the least word of it. The Emperor was, says the Comte, kind and cordial towards artists of all kinds who showed an

unquestioning devotion to himself and his ways of thinking—who, *en somme*, allowed themselves to be taught, and who never contradicted him. It was only, concludes Monsieur de Rémusat, when he became a great personage, that Napoleon forced himself to take an interest in matters which up till that time had given him no concern whatever. Even as regards Talma, it always seemed to close observers that he felt the actor's renown rather than his artistic greatness.

"At all periods of his life," insists Lecomte, notwithstanding the scepticism of M. de Rémusat, "Napoleon displayed a profound interest in everything connected with actors and acting." On the day after the battle of Marengo, he recalls, the First Consul spent an hour walking up and down a small vineyard surrounding his military headquarters. An aide-de-camp approached with a dispatch, and Bonaparte, awakened as from a deep reverie, astounded the officer with a long quotation from *La Mort de Pompée*:

> " J'ai servi, commandé, vaincu quarante années,
> Du monde entre mes mains j'ai vu les destinées ;
> Et j'ai toujours connu qu'en tout événement
> Le destin des Etats dépendait d'un moment."

On the fateful night of 20th March 1804, when he decides to sign the order for the murder of the Duc d'Enghien, he is heard to whisper the words spoken by Augustus, in *Cinna* :

> " Soyons amis, Cinna, c'est moi que t'en convie . . ."

And on the same tragical eve, the lines from *Alzire* :

> " Des dieux que nous servons, connais la différence :
> Les tiens t'ont commandé le meurtre et la vengeance ;
> Et le mien quand ton bras vient de m'assassiner,
> M'ordonne de te plaindre et de te pardonner."

After the battle of La Rothière, during the campaign of France, in 1814, he writes to his brother Joseph :

" I should prefer to see my son strangled than to think of him being brought up in Vienna in the midst of my enemies. . . . I have never yet witnessed *Andromache* without pitying the fate of Astyanax, whom I always thought happy in not surviving his father."

CHAPTER XVII

CONCLUSION

Kircheisen's Bibliography of Napoleon—One Book wanting—The Temperamental Aspect of Bonaparte —The "Napoleon" Test of Nationality—A Modern Imitator—The Imperishable Corsican

A SENSE of decency compels us to admit that any man who produces a *Napoleon* book, in these days, owes it to the public to explain the fact, and we willingly give our own reasons for the present performance—all the more so, indeed, because we have fully read and fairly digested our Kircheisen, and know what that voluminous bibliographer of the Napoleoniad has to say about the Grand Library of books and publications which deal with the Emperor and his coruscating legend. Here, in effect, is what Kircheisen will tell the inquirer in those two plump tomes which any wight may wade through with much instruction to himself:

(1) The number of individual books which record the story of Napoleon and his Age must now be counted by the tens of hundreds.

(2) Separate magazine and newspaper articles, born of the same heroic inspiration, have been written and published in their tens of thousands.

(3) If all the publishers' archives and the editorial and contributors' files of all the periodicals of all the nations could be assembled and given shelf-room, it would be found that Napoleon already plays a capital rôle in at least two hundred thousand books, *écrits divers*, reviews, turnovers, special articles and sundry other papers which have been committed to breathing type, at one time or another, by professional or amateur scribes.

It is clear from all this, therefore, that the writer is under some obligation to explain the reason of the present book:

A few years back an old fellow-student, writing from India, asked us to verify some expressions of opinion by Napoleon on literary and art matters, in respect of which our exile in Hindustan had no reference books at hand. In order to obtain the required opinions it was found necessary to consult some score of books in the Reading-Room of the British Museum. The idea then "developed," as they say in America, that a separate book might excusably be put together treating of the temperamental side of Napoleon, as indicated by the great soldier's heredity, his education, his reading, his literary, dramatic and art leanings, and his religion. Such a book in anything like complete form had not in English—nor indeed in French, German or Italian—as yet come into being. The facts might certainly be found in a large library of volumes, by well-known writers, dealing with the Eternal Corsican; but not with any completeness in any single volume which the writer has yet succeeded in discovering.

Master-students of Napoleon, like Mr Holland Rose, the Earl of Rosebery and Monsieur A. Guillois have—all serious readers are aware—thrown much light on the mind and character of the immense Man of Destiny, by touching on such intimate personal details, in works which have now become classics. These works were not, however, devoted specifically to a presentment of Napoleon considered almost wholly from his temperamental aspect. Our own endeavour has been to trace the mighty Corsican from this point

of consideration, and in one brief volume, by dealing with his superabounding chronicle in a series of chapters which have treated

(1) of his genealogy;

(2) of his early schooling;

(3) of his particular reading as a student and his general reading as a man;

(4) of his tastes in drama and music;

(5) of his associations with men and women connected with the theatre;

(6) of his predilections in painting and sculpture;

(7) of his literary bent and his connections and dealings with literary personages;

(8) of his understanding, or rather misunderstanding, of the functions of that important half-art which we call journalism;

(9) and, finally, of his religious beliefs—which last, we are permanently satisfied, were based solely on political expediency and were really atheistic.

A study of all these conditions, it may reasonably be supposed, must add something to the explanation of a personality which has proved itself at once one of the simplest and one of the most complex in the list of the world's great men.

We are a long way from classing ourselves among the detractors of the mighty Corsican, as is the fashion nowadays among many who derive their conceptions of Napoleon, his personality and his *œuvre*, from handbooks, or from romances which present Bonaparte as a central figure. We hold that if a conscious Providence exists, Napoleon

was assuredly an instrument of its will. At the same time we are equally far from thinking that he can be classed among the great spirits of the world, and we have arrived at the opinion that the student of history, in classifying the overwhelming personalities of the ages, will find himself forced to discriminate between great spirits and great men of action. A Lincoln, a Gladstone —here assuredly great spirits. A Napoleon, a Bismarck—arch-pragmatists, if ever. No; the spirit of pure philanthropy is altogether wanting in these.

Certainly, too, we have long since reached the conviction that Napoleon could never have imposed himself and his *réclame* on any race of Anglo-Saxon men—or even on a sane Germany—in any modern age, in any political circumstance, or with all his achievements multiplied by ten, in the same way as he succeeded in imposing his iron personality on a temperamental race whose greater spirits had gone under in that bloody Revolution which made his career a possibility. Indeed we have found by experience that the bias in favour of, or against Napoleon provides a satisfactory enough test of a man's nationality and character—whether he be a true Anglo-Saxon, a true Kelt, a true Latin, a true Teuton, and of the type of rigid and self-disciplined men who—to adapt Goethe—will drink no *foreign* wine.

And yet, for all the sordid materialism that underlies the epic of Napoleon, it must be conceded that it remains one of the moving

inspirations of all time. That great age of lustred exploit and adventure was, when the worst is said, inspired and led by one the supremacy of whose heroic mind was clear and incontestable as the limpid logic of its action and effect. And when in these days we contemplate the halting and convulsive performance of the puny histrion who would fain play the rôle of world-conqueror, vainly seeking to impress itself and its foul mission upon the mocking hemispheres, then, in truth, we of the unconquered Islands may well admit, with reverence of mind, if not of heart, the vast measure of our most formidable foe, the mighty Corsican—so wise in word and counsel, so sound in thought and project, and in act so swift, so unerring, so magical—NAPOLEON!

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